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Monterey, CA; Naval Postgraduate School

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# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**SOUTH KOREA AND THE THAAD: ITS DECISION AND  
DEPLOYMENT**

by

Seung Kim

March 2020

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Wade L. Huntley  
Robert J. Weiner

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**SOUTH KOREA AND THE THAAD: ITS DECISION AND DEPLOYMENT**

Seung Kim  
Major, Republic of Korea Air Force  
BE, R.O.K Air Force Academy, 2007

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(FAR EAST, SOUTHEAST ASIA, THE PACIFIC)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
March 2020**

Approved by: Wade L. Huntley  
Advisor

Robert J. Weiner  
Second Reader

Afshon P. Ostovar  
Associate Chair for Research  
Department of National Security Affairs

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis divides the controversy over Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) into the phases of decision and deployment and assesses the influence of five independent drivers in this timeline: 1) changes in pressure from the United States 2) changes in pressure from China driving external structural changes in South Korea, 3) increases in North Korea's nuclear threat, 4) the roles of the ROK's powerful presidency and conservative South Korea's policymakers, and 5) political participation of the public. The thesis evaluates how these drivers influenced Korea's decision-making from the start of the debate to the deployment of the THAAD system.

This thesis argues that, first, the North Korean threat played the most critical role in the decision itself and in accelerating deployment of THAAD throughout the timeline. Second, political pressures from the U.S. and China influenced Korea's THAAD decision in different directions. Third, ROK policy-makers, a domestic factor, influenced the THAAD deployment decision but did not affect the deployment of THAAD equipment. However, the emergence of a progressive leader with different political tendencies contributed to the delay in the full deployment of THAAD. Fourth, participation of the public did not affect the THAAD deployment decision, but for a time delayed deployment after the THAAD decision. Finally, the external factors were hardly influenced by domestic factors, whereas instead domestic factors were influenced by external factors.



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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AESA	Active Electronically Scanned Array
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
BMD	ballistic missile defense
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CPRK	Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea
DOD	Department of Defense
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EPB	Economy Planning Board
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
G-20	Group of 20
HEU	high-enriched uranium
HUAV	high-altitude reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicle
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
IRBM	intermediate-range ballistic missile
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organization
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KAMD	Korea Air & Missile Defense
KBS	Korean Broadcasting System
KCNA	Korean Central News Agency
KEDO	Korea Energy Development Organization
KOTRA	Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency
KR/FE	Key Resolve/Foal Eagle
L-SAM	Long Range Surface to Air Missile
MBC	Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation
MD	missile defense
MDA	Missile Defense Agency
MND	Ministry of National Defense
MRBM	Medium-range ballistic missile



M-SAM	Medium Range Surface to Air Missile
NPT	Nonproliferation Treaty
NRTA	National Radio and Television Administration
NSC	National Security Council
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPCON	operational control
OPLAN	operation plan
PACOM	Pacific Command
RAND	Research and Development Corporation
ROK	Republic of Korea
SCM	security consultative meeting
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLBM	submarine-launched ballistic missile
SNS	Social Network Service
SOFA	status-of-forces agreement
SRBM	short-range ballistic missile
TEL	transporter-erector-launcher
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UN	United Nations
USFJ	United States Forces, Japan
USFK	United States Forces, Korea
USNORTHCOM	United States Northern Command

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

On July 7, 2016, South Korea and the United States announced the deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>1</sup> They explained that this decision was aimed at preventing North Korea's escalating nuclear and missile threats. Due to the North's continued increase in nuclear threats and sophistication of its missile capabilities, the South Korean government needed measures to prepare for a possible attack. Among the proposed measures, the government chose THAAD as its military capability.

South Korea's deployment process, however, was not smooth. There has been a lot of fierce debate between those in favor and those in opposition. Finally, in April 2017, THAAD was deployed to Seongju, three years after the initial request by General Curtis Scaparrotti as the commander of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK).<sup>2</sup> By contrast, Japan's deployment process was different from Korea's. In Japan, the THAAD radar was installed on two bases, deployed for the first time three months after the decision was made in September 2005.

This thesis addresses the question raised by the longer time period for the decision by the Republic of Korea (ROK): "What factors influenced ROK decision making regarding THAAD deployment?" To understand the decision outcomes, this thesis evaluates external factors, such as changes in pressure from the United States and China and North Korea's nuclear threat; and domestic factors, such as conservative South Korea's policy-makers and the political participation of the public. This thesis examines this decision-making process in two phases: evaluates factors leading to South Korea's

---

<sup>1</sup> Sang-Hun Choe, "South Korea and U.S. Agree to Deploy Missile Defense System." *The New York Times*, July 7, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/world/asia/south-korea-and-us-agree-to-deploy-missile-defense-system.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Sang Ho Song, "USFK Chief Recommends THAAD to Korea," *The Korea Herald*, June 3, 2014, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20140603001294>.

decision to deploy THAAD, and then assesses factors that account for the delays in that deployment.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

This thesis on THAAD is of great significance for three reasons. First of all, it is a meaningful study on the ROK-U.S. alliance. The ROK-U.S. alliance is undergoing many changes. The number of the U.S. troops stationed in South Korea, up to 325,000 since the Korean War, has been greatly reduced, and many policy decisions have been made regarding Korea's wartime operational control (OPCON).<sup>3</sup> In addition, the ROK-U.S. alliance faces many upcoming policy decisions regarding the revision of the status of forces agreement (SOFA), the security burden, and the transfer of wartime OPCON. At this point, understanding the decision process surrounding THAAD deployment and resistance to THAAD will provide insight into variables that might affect future decisions.

Second, the THAAD episode is an example of the democratic characteristics of South Korea and people's involvement in decision making related to North Korea's threats. South Korea has undergone many changes through the process of democratization. In particular, South Korea's authoritarian democracy transitioned to its present liberal democratic phase through many social conflicts and struggles. In this context, analyzing how the THAAD decision regarding the issue of survival from the North Korean threat is related to the emergence of democracy in South Korea will provide important data to examine the relevance of the North Korean threat to South Korea's democracy.

Lastly, this thesis expands the scope of academic discussion about national security decision making. In particular, the analysis of independent variables and dependent variables related to Korea's policy decisions entails applying existing theoretical discussions related to decision making to empirical evidence from THAAD in 2016. There are few such studies related to the Korean government's decision making on

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<sup>3</sup> Hwee-rhak Park, "An Impact of the Controversies over the THAAD to the South Korea-U.S. Alliance and the South Korea-China Relationship : Application of Autonomy-Security Trade Model," *Journal of International Politics* 21, no. 1 (June 30, 2016), 39.  
<http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Journal/ArticleDetail/NODE06696308>.

THAAD. Many papers and materials tend to judge South Korea's decision as a product of the great power competition between China and the United States rather than focusing on Korea's decision making itself. Moreover, such studies tend to grasp the deployment of THAAD from the perspective of China and the United States rather than putting the weight of the discussion on the decision itself. Nevertheless, decision making in South Korea, as in any democracy, involves the interaction of complex factors. Therefore, research to reveal the variables that have affected the THAAD decision will be very meaningful to academic understanding of national security decision making as well as to practical knowledge of South Korea's security posture and democratic institutions.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are three categories of literature related to South Korea's THAAD decision making. First, some scholars have analyzed viewpoints that judgments based on inaccurate information have influenced policy decisions, focusing on policy-makers and individuals' perspectives. Second, there are experts who assess how political controversy arising from the South Korean public's concerns about the state's survival and the transparency of the THAAD process has served as an independent variable in relation to the delay in the deployment of THAAD. Finally, there are researchers who argue that the deployment of THAAD was influenced by the U.S. and China's hegemonic power race.

One explanation for South Korea's delay in deploying THAAD was indecision by policy-makers themselves. Brianni Lee asserts that the lack of long-term strategic viewpoints of policy-makers and the absence of economic and political judgment by South Korean policy-makers contributed to the deployment of the THAAD.<sup>4</sup> South Korea, the only divided nation in East Asia, has made military decisions that run counter to its long-term policy goal of seeking peaceful reunification with North Korea from a long-term perspective, as well as increasing military tensions in East Asia. These military tensions are definitely not economically and politically beneficial for South Korea. This

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<sup>4</sup> Brianni Lee, "Thaad Deployment in South Korea: Militarism Leading to Political Regression." *Harvard International Review* 38, no. 1 (January 1, 2017), 34–35. <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.nps.edu/docview/1906058571?accountid=12702>

means that policy-makers lacked long-term strategic thinking and played an important role in the deployment of the THAAD.<sup>5</sup>

Other researchers suggest that THAAD was deployed because some policy-makers' support for THAAD was challenged by various trends in South Korean public opinion. Hwee-Rhak Park focuses on individual perspectives in the decision-making process. Park tried to untangle the THAAD connection using the concept of 'misperception' from Robert Jervis.<sup>6</sup> According to Jervis, generally, decision-makers make decisions based on their rationality. This determination requires that information about the consequences of each option be provided to policy-makers and that information is accurate and reliable. Similar to an individual's decision, there may be a misunderstanding in the state's decisions, which Robert Jervis defines as "misperception."<sup>7</sup> More precisely, as individuals make erroneous decisions based on uncertain knowledge and obscure information, national policy-makers make misleading decisions because of misperception. Misperception is also caused by various prejudices of individuals and groups, and Robert Jervis asserts that it actually happens quite frequently.<sup>8</sup> It is difficult for any person to obtain all the information available about a particular issue, and because each person has a different perception framework to process such information, he or she makes various judgments for each person. This recognition is judged as "misperception" if the event or phenomenon is not properly managed due to significant differences from the real world.

From this point of view, Park focused on individuals and policy-makers in the policy-making process to analyze their role in the decision-making process of THAAD. Park argues that the main reason behind the controversy of South Korea's Ballistic

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<sup>5</sup> Lee, 34.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Jervis.

<sup>8</sup> Jervis.

Missile Defense (BMD) is the misperception created by domestic public opinion,<sup>9</sup> emphasizing that the “misperception” created by the people in the process of deploying the THAAD had worked on policy-makers.<sup>10</sup> According to Park’s assertion, unconfirmed knowledge and information regarding how THAAD deployment would tie South Korea to wider programs of Missile Defense (MD) pursued by the United States created misperceptions among decision-makers that contributed to South Korea’s delayed building of the BMD capability. In sum, ultimately, misperception affected policy-makers, which led to a delay in the deployment of THAAD.

Park maintains that the development of democracy has been a major catalyst for these factors to work.<sup>11</sup> With the development of democracy, the proportion of public opinion reflected in policy decisions is increasing. Yet, people are more likely than policy-makers to use insufficient or distorted information. As a result of the accumulation of misperceptions by the people in South Korea, they eventually pressured decision-makers, which led them to fall into the dilemma of decision making.

Furthermore, there are experts who argue that the public debate over the issue of people’s survival and transparency in procedures has affected the deployment of THAAD. South Korea operates as a democracy, which guarantees the participation of the people in policy by law, whether direct or indirect. With the development of many policy-participation tools, political participation is carried out through various channels. For example, a group can stage demonstrations or suggest or oppose policies through the media. The development of democracy and the development of political means certainly serve as tools of pressure for policy-makers.

As soon as the THAAD deployment was announced, many South Koreans opposed the deployment of THAAD for various reasons.<sup>12</sup> The opposition’s argument

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<sup>9</sup> Hwee-rhak Park, “Influence of the Misperception on the South Korean Ballistic Missile Defense: Focused on a Comparison with Japanese Ballistic Missile Defense,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 24, no. 2 (July, 2017), 7–34. <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Article/NODE07221337>.

<sup>10</sup> Park.

<sup>11</sup> Park, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Lee, 34–35.



was very intense on two factors. Opponents argued that the electromagnetic waves produced by THAAD would threaten the public safety and cause catastrophic damage to the environment.<sup>13</sup> According to the literature, these concerns might have affected THAAD deployment.<sup>14</sup> At the time when the THAAD deployment was not completed, there was a presidential election in South Korea, and Moon Jae - In, a prominent candidate for the South Korean presidency, opposed Park Geun-Hye's government's deployment of THAAD.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to this fear of electromagnetic waves, scholars argued that the South Korean government's secrecy surrounding the THAAD deployment was an important factor contributing to the emotional expansion of anti-THAAD sentiment.<sup>16</sup> The Park Geun-Hye administration hastily passed the final deployment stage of the launch-pad to prevent the new president from overturning the decision, adding to the controversy of transparency.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the fact that the Defense Ministry did not intentionally announce that four new launchers have been introduced since the new presidential inauguration has complicated matters.<sup>18</sup> In addition to these factors, the fact that the ROK government does not have the authority to acquire or intercept radar information related to North Korea's missiles at the time of actual operation was also a factor against THAAD.<sup>19</sup> For these reasons, opposition to THAAD has been actively mobilized around Seongju residents. These controversies further accelerated the momentum against the

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<sup>13</sup> Lee, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Brianni Lee, 34–35; “THAAD on the Korean Peninsula,” *Institute for Security & Development Policy*, (October, 2017). <http://isdpeu/publication/korea-thaad/>.

<sup>15</sup> “THAAD on the Korean Peninsula.”

<sup>16</sup> Lee.

<sup>17</sup> Jenna Gibson, “For South Koreans, THAAD Isn’t about the United States, China, or Even North Korea...It’s about Park Geun-hye,” *Pacific Forum*, July 24, 2017, <https://www.pacforum.org/analysis/pacnet-53-south-koreans-thaad-isn%E2%80%99t-about-united-states-china-or-even-north-korea%E2%80%A6it%E2%80%99s>.

<sup>18</sup> Gibson.

<sup>19</sup> Gibson.

unilateral decision by the South Korean government as a representative democracy in East Asia and the government's restriction of information acquisition by the people.

Finally, some scholars articulate that the South Korea decision-making process has been affected not only by domestic politics but also by the power competition between China and the United States. East Asian countries, including South Korea, are realizing that they are in two orders: the U.S.-led security order and the Chinese economic order.<sup>20</sup> This is because the U.S.-led East Asian hegemonic order is shifting to more complex directions due to China's rise. For example, a meeting of think tanks in South Korea and the United States held in Santa Monica under the leadership of the Research and Development (RAND) Corporation in the United States in 2017 identified the primary threats to the ROK-U.S. alliance as instability and collapse in North Korea, China's growing economic power, and conflicting signals from public opinion.<sup>21</sup> Experts from the United States and South Korea are now worried about China's growth, therefore China's economic impact would be a potential threat to the ROK-U.S. alliance. The hegemonic role that the United States has been guarding for a long time is being threatened by China.

G. John Ikenberry argues that South Korea, which is heavily influenced by the United States and China, would have applied a strategy between "mixed strategies" and "bandwagoning" for decision making related to THAAD.<sup>22</sup> South Korea is a middle power that is connected to both the United States and China. Ikenberry argues that as China becomes a regional power, the middle powers, including South Korea, will attract America and maintain the region's balance of power.<sup>23</sup> It is possible to explain, according to Ikenberry's argument, that the power imbalance caused by China's

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<sup>20</sup> G. John Ikenberry, "Between the Eagle and the Dragon: America, China, and Middle State Strategies in East Asia." *Political Science Quarterly* 131, no. 1 (March 2016), 9–43, <https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12430>.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce W. Bennett and Booseung Chang, *Strengthening U.S.-ROK Relations in the New Administrations of the United States and South Korea*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf\\_proceedings/CF364.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF364.html)

<sup>22</sup> Ikenberry.

<sup>23</sup> Ikenberry, 9–43.

continued economic development and military buildup has attracted the military resources of the United States in South Korea.

According to Jaganath Sankaran and Bryan L. Fearey's claims, China considers South Korea the weakest link among its allies and recognizes that it can weaken the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>24</sup> South Korea and China promote each other's national interests through productive economic partnerships and cultural exchanges, but they differ in recognizing North Korea's problems. China shows a desire to avoid damage from political instability in North Korea, while at the same time aiming to minimize U.S. influence toward North Korea.<sup>25</sup> South Korea, on the other hand, depends on the United States for its national security needs and relies on the United States to balance threats as North Korea's threats increase.<sup>26</sup> As a result, these researchers conclude that the change in perceptions of China and the influence of the United States caused a delay in the determination of THAAD to the South Korean government.

Other research suggests that the power competition between the United States and China has influenced South Korea's autonomy in its decision. James Morrow and Michael F. Altfeld insist on the inverse relationship between autonomy and security, where relatively weak countries like South Korea accept the sacrifice of autonomy in return for promoting security.<sup>27</sup> In other words, a relatively weak country enhances its security by forming an alliance with a great power state, improving conditions to deal with the enemy that would be difficult with its own capabilities, such as the ROK-U.S. alliance since the Korean War.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, relatively weak countries are forced to sacrifice their autonomy to the great powers.

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<sup>24</sup> Jaganath Sankaran and Bryan L. Fearey, "Missile Defense and Strategic Stability: Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea," *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 3 (September 2, 2017): 321–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2017.1280744>.

<sup>25</sup> Sankaran and Fearey.

<sup>26</sup> Sankaran and Fearey.

<sup>27</sup> James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliance," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (1991): 904–933.

<sup>28</sup> Morrow.

Hwee-Rhak Park analyzed the influence of the United States and China by using the “autonomy-security trade off model” presented by Morrow and Altfeld.<sup>29</sup> According to Park’s argument, after the “strategic cooperation partnership” with China on August 25, 2008, the economic dependence of China and South Korea has deepened, and this deepening relationship has affected the existing the ROK-U.S. alliance and affected the autonomy of South Korea in the course of the THAAD resolution.<sup>30</sup>

As stated previously, much literature articulates the decision about THAAD deployment and associated factors that could affect the decision. Few studies, however, have been done in connection with changes in pressure from the United States and China regarding South Korea’s THAAD decision making. Many studies tend to dismiss the autonomy of South Korea’s decision making as being structurally affected. Yet, the structural explanation alone does not fully illuminate the role of South Korea’s decision-making process. This is due to the fact that it is difficult to find data that can link changes in structure and decision-making.

In addition, as other expert studies show, the shift in North Korean threats (from conventional to nuclear) plays a huge role in South Korea’s military policy making. North Korea’s steady provocations have always been emphasized as a political and social issue for South Korea since the Korean War. Because of these facts, the defense ministry’s highest priority always focused on North Korea’s military capability.

The study of decision making by the Park Geun-Hye administration has not been done because of the large social issue of impeachment of the president. In other words, controversy in professionalism is a major constraint on decision making.<sup>31</sup> But the Park administration is also a key link in the THAAD study because policy-makers play a vital role in policy decision making and policy changes in accordance with the conservative policy-makers.

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<sup>29</sup> Park, “An Impact of the Controversies over the THAAD to the South Korea-U.S. Alliance and the South Korea-China Relation: Application of Autonomy-Security Trade Model,” 39.

<sup>30</sup> Park.

<sup>31</sup> Sang-Hun Choe, “South Korea Removes President Park Geun-hye,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/world/asia/park-geun-hye-impeached-south-korea.html>.

From the realist point of view, it is possible to look at the problem through the lens of balance of threat and still find the THAAD deployment as insufficient. Even the deployment of this military resource was very controversial, which is hard for realists to explain. North Korea is apparently increasing its threat by developing and testing nuclear weapons and missile technologies, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM). External threats and changes in material power should be swiftly increased and defensive measures taken for South Korea, which regards North Korea as the biggest threat. Nevertheless, many people in South Korea opposed the deployment, and the deployment was delayed.

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS**

Factors affecting South Korea's decision are diverse and complex. As described in the literature review, little prior research has utilized theories of national decision making to better understand national security policy outcomes in South Korea. This thesis will fill that gap by evaluating how four specific independent variables influenced South Korea's decision-making on THAAD and the deployment, and what factors played a crucial role in that decision.

Therefore, the dependent variable to be explained in this thesis is the THAAD decision-making process, including the initial decision for THAAD and the delay of its deployment. The independent variables are: 1) changes in pressure by the United States, 2) changes in pressure from China driving external structural changes in South Korea, 3) an increased nuclear threat from North Korea, 4) the influence of conservative policy-makers in South Korea, and 5) the political participation of the public.

#### **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

To analyze the factors that influenced the THAAD decision-making process leading up to deployment in April 2017, this paper examines the factors that led to the THAAD decision-making process through the core techniques of the process-tracing research method in two phases. The first phase covers the period from 2014 when the initial THAAD controversy began to 2016 when THAAD deployment was decided. The second phase covers the period between 2016 and April 2017 when a few parts of the

THAAD system were first deployed. The reason why process tracing is used as a research method for this case is because it tracks causal mechanisms using a detailed analysis of how independent and dependent variables interact in real-life situations.<sup>32</sup> In addition, this method of study is useful to increase understanding of causality that has resulted in specific historical cases.<sup>33</sup> This thesis applies this method in two phases in order to identify whether different causal processes were important in each one.

Overall, this thesis analyzes the external pressure change variables originating from the United States and China and the increase in North Korea's nuclear threat as external factors in order to enhance understanding of the causal mechanism related to the THAAD episode from 2014 to 2017. At the same time, this thesis analyzes the conservative decision-makers in South Korea and the political participation of the public in terms of internal factors. Using process-tracing principles, the thesis will evaluate the relative importance of these key factors at various points in the two phases of the decision making on THAAD.

Still, the limitation is that the independent variables of this paper are not completely independent. In more detail, the domestic variables, policy-maker and public, defined in this paper cannot be said to be completely free of external factors. Policy-makers, for example, are very sensitive to U.S. and Chinese policy. Also, the public reaction to North Korea's provocations is quite dynamic. Nevertheless, sometimes South Korea's policy-makers make decisions that outperform the needs of China and the United States, and the South Korean public pays little attention to North Korea's provocations. Considering these features, this paper will look at whether the relationships between variables were independent or dependent.

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<sup>32</sup> Derek Beach, "Process-Tracing Methods in Social Science." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017.  
<https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-176>.

<sup>33</sup> Beach.

In addition to this analysis, this research examines how much external and internal factors influence the decision and delay of THAAD by tabulating a board (shown in Table 1) and seeks each factor's interconnectivity and priority.

Table 1. Example board for the THAAD decision and delay factors.

	External Factors			Domestic Factors	
1 <sup>st</sup> Phase	North Korea	U.S.	China	Leader	Public
Nukes crisis					
Combined exercise		Accelerate	Delay	Accelerate	
...					Delay
...	Delay				
...					
...					
...					
THAAD Decision and delay					

Key: In the table, red: high, yellow: low, —→ : Dependence

First, primary sources to look at changes in the security environment are defense white papers, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) annual reports, and official statements and documents by leadership. Secondary sources include news reports, research articles in the field of defense, journalist articles, etc. The main indicators used are changes in military equipment, changes in strategic weapons, and changes in nuclear threats.

Second, primary sources for examining changes in the alliance with the United States are the Defense White Paper, interview materials of the decision-makers of the United States and Korea, security consultative meeting (SCM) joint statement materials, and official statements, and documents. Secondary sources include experts on the ROK-U.S. alliance and articles. The indicators for analysis are the number of negative expressions of decision-makers in both the ROK-U.S. alliance, arms sales in both countries, and the number of combined exercises and operation.

Third, to analyze Sino-Korean relations, primary sources are official statements and documents, and secondary sources use related articles and articles. This part uses the

number of mutual leadership visits, economic interdependence, and institution as indicators to investigate it.

Fourth, in order to investigate the conservative decision-makers in South Korea, primary sources are official interviews, statements by leadership, and preferred policies, and secondary sources are reliable newspapers and experts' reports and articles.

Lastly, to find out the political participation of the public, this thesis looks at the V-Dem annual reports, reliable newspapers, expert papers and research, and government reports.

## **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This paper consists of five chapters, starting with the Introduction, which includes the main research question, the major significance of research, literature review, and hypothesis related to the THAAD decision.

Chapter II provides background for understanding the THAAD issue. First, it explains how North Korea's nuclear threat changes until the THAAD debate begins and then explains the relationship between the United States and China. Finally, it describes the characteristics of democracy in South Korea related to domestic factors.

Chapter III focuses on the first phase, the period from 2014 when the initial THAAD controversy began until 2016 when the THAAD deployment was decided, and analyzes how four independent factors influenced the initial decision to deploy THAAD in the Korean Peninsula. First, this chapter examines changes in North Korea's nuclear threat and ICBM capability, and conventional military capabilities to analyze changes in the security environment. In addition, this chapter analyzes how the ROK-U.S. alliance and the Sino-Korean relations structurally influenced South Korea's THAAD decision. Lastly, it examines how domestic factors affected the THAAD decision itself.

Chapter IV focuses on the second phase, comprising the period from the initial THAAD deployment decision until South Korea's actual deployment of THAAD equipment to Seongju. Focusing on this period, this chapter analyzes the influence of four



factors, including domestic factors and external factors. Finally, conclusions are drawn to determine the crucial factors that affected the timeline of the THAAD deployment.

The final chapter summarizes the main conclusion of the paper and outlines which factors influenced South Korea's decision making and what factors created a delay of the THAAD deployment. This chapter then discusses the implications of these findings for both theories of national security decision making and for a better understanding of ROK security policy and democratic processes. Finally, this chapter discusses the limitations of the findings and opportunities for future research.

## II. BACKGROUND OF THE THAAD

This chapter describes the background of the Korean Peninsula security environment. The analysis covers international factors, as well as domestic ones. The reason for this analysis is that understanding the security environment of the Korean Peninsula is essential to understanding THAAD.

### A. NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR AND MISSILE PROGRAM

North Korea's nuclear program and missile development are considered a serious threat to the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>34</sup> The threat judgment of the ROK-U.S. alliance has made the United States promise to provide extended deterrence by operating all military capabilities, including nuclear threats, conventional strikes, and missile defense, to South Korea. The two countries have concurred on this commitment at their Security Consultative Meetings every year since 2013.<sup>35</sup> In other words, North Korea's nuclear program and ballistic missile threats are a major factor in changing the threat perception of the ROK-U.S. alliance, which is a necessary factor in the determination of defensive assets related to THAAD.

According to Glenn Snyder's argument, external threats typically lead states to choose between options of "deterrence by denial" or "deterrence by punishment."<sup>36</sup> Also, for centuries, deterrence has been achieved by having the capability to resist enemy threats through the development of military power.<sup>37</sup> In this context, to understand how South Korea reacted to North Korea's nuclear and missile program in the first phase, this

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<sup>34</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense. *Joint Communique of 50<sup>th</sup> U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2018).  
<https://www.usfk.mil/Media/News/Article/1679753/joint-communique-of-50th-us-rok-security-consultative-meeting/>.

<sup>35</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense.

<sup>36</sup> Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 9–15.

<sup>37</sup> Uk Heo and Terence Roehrig, *The Evolution of the South Korea-United States Alliance* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 25.

section first reviews the process of change and development of the threat from North Korea up to 2013.

North Korea has longed for nuclear development since the Kim Il-Sung regime, which recognized the power of nuclear weapons after the Second World War. From the regime of Kim Il-Sung, scientists for nuclear development were sent to the Soviet Union and educated. Since then, Kim's regime has continued to develop nuclear weapons. In 1982, however, North Korea's nuclear program first appeared as a security threat to the international community when U.S. satellites detected the construction of a nuclear facility in Yongbyon.<sup>38</sup> The United States pressured Russia to compel North Korea to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, North Korea did not come into compliance with its NPT obligations and continued suspicious nuclear activities. After a crisis in 1993–94, the United States succeeded in temporarily shutting down the nuclear reactor at Yongbyon but failed to prevent North Korea from continuing its nuclear program's ambition.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1990s, North Korea showed its willingness to denuclearize several times to the international community, but at the same time, its behavior raised questions about its credibility. (See Table 2.) The credibility issue was further highlighted by the U.S. discovery of uranium-based program in the 2000s, with North Korea further strengthening its commitment to nuclear development through its withdrawal from the NPT. North Korea crossed a major threshold in its commitment to continued nuclear development by conducting a nuclear test in 2006.

Subsequently, North Korea asked the international community for energy assistance and economic cooperation in exchange for giving up its nuclear program. However, as if to ridicule the international community's efforts to denuclearize North Korea, it conducted two further nuclear tests in 2009 and 2013; in 2013, the destructive power was 6–9 kilotons, more than double the previous two nuclear tests. (See Table 2.)

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<sup>38</sup> Heo and Roehrig, 136–137.

<sup>39</sup> Heo and Roehrig, 136.

Table 2. North Korea's nuclear threat timeline before 2014.<sup>40</sup>

Timeline	Description
1985	North Korea signs the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
1992	North Korea signs the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula with South Korea.
1993*	The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) requests that inspectors be given access to two nuclear waste storage sites. In response, North Korea threatens to quit the NPT but eventually opts to continue participating in the treaty.
1994*	North Korea and the United States sign an agreement. North Korea pledges to freeze and eventually dismantle its nuclear reactors at the Yongbyon site. In return, the United States, South Korea, and Japan form the Korea Energy Development Organization (KEDO) to build two new light-water nuclear reactors.
2002	The U.S. government reveals that North Korea has admitted operating its nuclear program based on highly-enriched uranium (HEU).
2003	North Korea withdraws from the NPT and declares that they possess nuclear weapons.
2005*	North Korea tentatively agrees to give up its entire nuclear program, including weapons. In exchange, the United States, China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea say they will provide energy assistance to North Korea, as well as promote economic cooperation.
2006	North Korea conducts its first nuclear weapon test in October.
2007*	North Korea agrees to shut down its main nuclear reactor in exchange for an aid package worth \$400 million, but North Korea misses the deadline.
2009	North Korea conducts its second nuclear test on May 25.
2013	North Korea conducts its third nuclear test on February 12. This is the first nuclear test under the Kim Jong Un regime.

Note: \* directly quoted from the CNN web source.

While there was no public information proving that North Korea possesses operational nuclear weapons until 2013, the U.S. Director of National Intelligence in

<sup>40</sup> Heo and Roehrig, 137–140; “North Korea Nuclear Timeline Fast Facts,” *CNN*, May 6, 2019. <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/29/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-timeline---fast-facts/index.html>.

January 2012 estimated that North Korea produced nuclear weapons.<sup>41</sup> Even though it is difficult to find accurate data on the total amount of nuclear weapons possessed by North Korea, according to the SIPRI 2013 annual report, it is estimated that North Korea has about six to eight nuclear weapons.<sup>42</sup> It is also estimated that North Korea possesses about 40 kilograms of plutonium, which can produce nuclear weapons through several reprocessing processes of spent fuel rods, and that North Korea is advancing the Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) program.<sup>43</sup>

North Korea's missile development began in earnest with North Korea's nuclear development as it acquired missile technology from the Soviet Union from the 1960s. The North conducted its first test launch of the Scud-B at 300 kilometers (km) in April 1984, and the threat of North Korea's missiles has escalated in both quality and quantity over time, threatening the security of the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>44</sup> The Scud-C missile with a 320-km range was tested and deployed in 1993. It was capable of hitting all parts of the Korean Peninsula. In addition, after the test launch of Rodong missiles with a range of 1,300 km, it became operational. In 2007, Musudan missiles with a range of 3,000 km were deployed. As a result, North Korea has the capability to make a direct blow to South Korea, Japan, and Guam.<sup>45</sup>

North Korea's ambition for continued missile development has turned to long-range missiles that could hit the U.S. mainland directly. Since the late 1990s, North Korea began developing ICBM capability under the Kim Jong-Il regime and tested and

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<sup>41</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "SIPRI yearbook 2013," SIPRI, accessed August 25, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013>.

<sup>42</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

<sup>43</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, *2014 Defense White Paper* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2014), 28, [http://www.mnd.go.kr/user/mnd/upload/pblict/PBLICTNEBOOK\\_201308060946041630.pdf](http://www.mnd.go.kr/user/mnd/upload/pblict/PBLICTNEBOOK_201308060946041630.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Missile Defense Project, "North Korean Missile Launches & Nuclear Test: 1984-Present," *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (April 20, 2017) last modified August 15, 2019, <http://missilethreat.csis.org/north-korea-missile-launches-1984-present/>.

<sup>45</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, *2012 Defense White Paper* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2012), 29, [http://www.mnd.go.kr/user/mnd/upload/pblict/PBLICTNEBOOK\\_201308060946041630.pdf](http://www.mnd.go.kr/user/mnd/upload/pblict/PBLICTNEBOOK_201308060946041630.pdf).

launched the Taepodong-1 missile in 1998 and Taepodong-2 missile in 2006. It flew 3,800 km to the east coast of Japan.<sup>46</sup>

Under the Kim Jong-Un regime, which inherited Kim Jong Il's power in December 2011, North Korea began testing missiles with ranges approaching the U.S. mainland. In April 2012, it failed to launch a long-range missile, Unha-3, using the third Taepodong-2 missile as the three-stage rocket.<sup>47</sup> The fourth missile test took place on December 12, 2012, the same year as the third test, under a different name, the Kwongsong-4, and North Korea boasted extensively to the North Korean public and the international community that it successfully put a satellite into orbit, although the United States denied that the North Korean satellite had entered orbit normally.<sup>48</sup>

Analysts argue that Kim Jong-Un is continuing to make efforts to show himself to be a worthy successor and that the success of the rocket test in 2012 not only served as an antidote to humiliating failures in the early days of his rule but also served as a decisive factor in Kim Jong-Un's attempts to continue to strengthen his grip on strong military power.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, despite international concerns and opposition until 2013, the North's nuclear and missile program has continued to develop technologically due to the Kim family's great interest and efforts, posing a threat to the international community as well as East Asia. Through numerous missile tests, North Korea has developed ICBMs that are likely to reach not only South Korea and Japan but also the United States. Three rounds of nuclear tests have resulted in the increase of its explosion scale from 0.5 to 2 kilotons to 6–9 kilotons, but the controversy has persisted over whether North Korea has a warhead sufficiently small to fit on long-range ballistic missiles.

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<sup>46</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>47</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>48</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>49</sup> Sang-hun Choe, "Kim Jong-un Earns Cachet with Rocket's Success," *The New York Times*, December 12, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/13/world/asia/kim-jong-uns-image-bolstered-by-rocket-launching.html?ref=asia>.

## **B. THE ROK-U.S. ALLIANCE AS AN ASYMMETRIC ALLIANCE**

The ROK-U.S. alliance has remained durable since the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953.<sup>50</sup> This asymmetrical alliance, forged shortly after the Korean War, still exists after the continued growth of South Korea's economy and military forces. The United States is offering security and a nuclear umbrella to South Korea through the USFK stationed in South Korea. At the center of the USFK, the military forces of South Korea and the United States form the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command for command and control, and by developing and practicing operation plans (OPLAN), they are working to prepare for deterrence on the Korean Peninsula and war in case of emergency.

The alliance between South Korea and the United States has been an asymmetric alliance between a great power and a weaker country since the Korean War. Immediately after the Korean War, Korea had to rely on the United States for its survival and handed over ROK military operational control to the United States. The asymmetry of the ROK-U.S. alliance in the international system is evident when looking at their positions and influence in the international system, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Group of 20 (G-20). In terms of economic power, as seen in Figure 1, the gap between South Korea and the United States has steadily increased since 2009.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Park, 39.

<sup>51</sup> "2019 Military Strength Ranking," Global Fire Power, accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>.

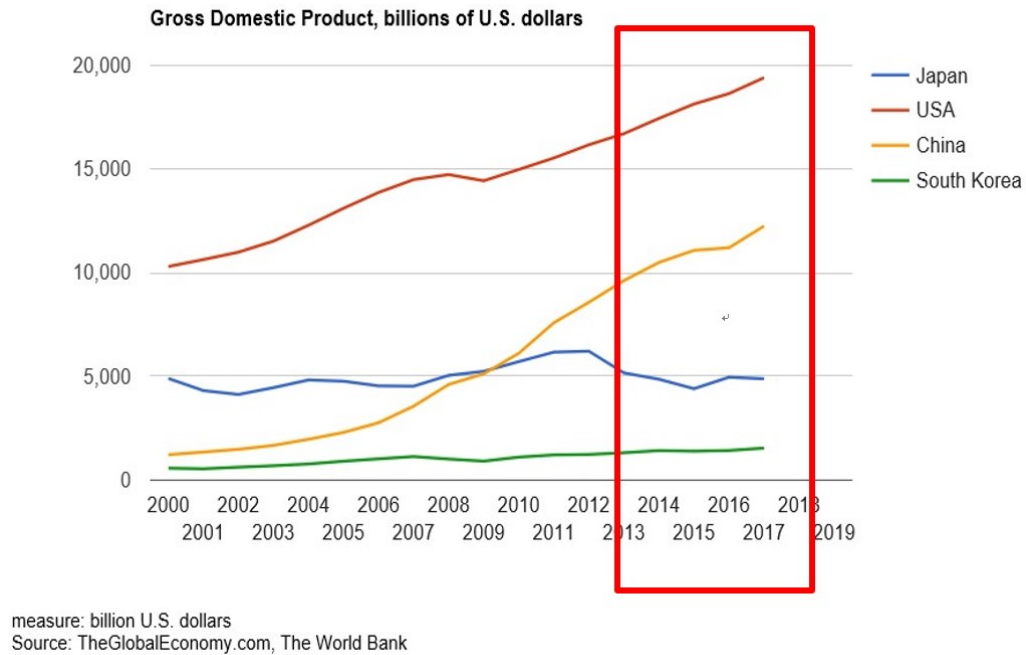


Figure 1. Economic power.<sup>52</sup>

In terms of military power, the gap between South Korea and the United States is still considerable. Figure 2 shows the index from 2000 to 2018 by using the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.<sup>53</sup> According to this index, differences in military power between South Korea and the United States have diminished the gap in military power from 2014 to 2017 compared to before 2014, but there is still asymmetry. (See Figure 2.)

<sup>52</sup> “Compare Countries with Annual Data from Official Sources,” The Global Economy, accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/compare-countries/>.

<sup>53</sup> “Military Expenditure Data,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.



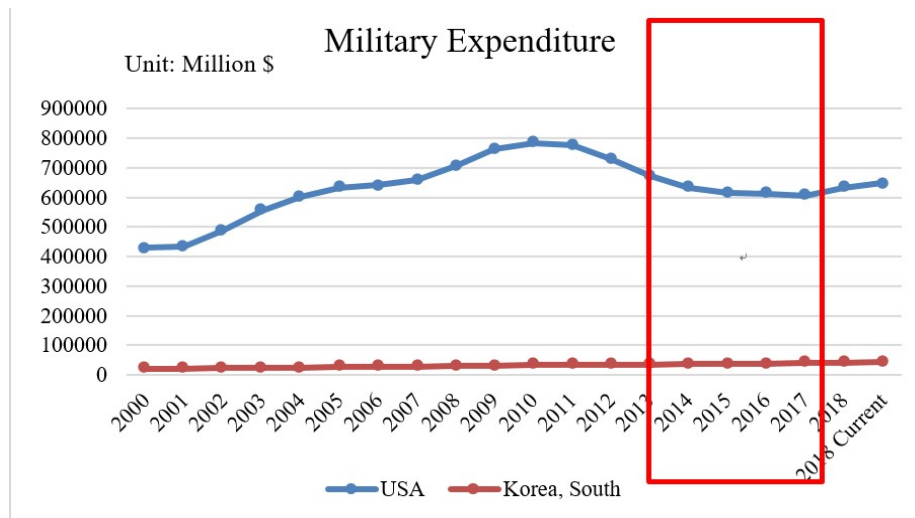


Figure 2. Military expenditure data.<sup>54</sup>

The difference between the United States and South Korea in the international system is even more apparent. The United States, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security in accordance with Article 24 of the Charter of the UN.<sup>55</sup> In voting on issues such as disputes that threaten international peace or enforcement including military forces, the United States, a permanent member, has one right to vote and additionally has the right to veto the final resolution.

In contrast, South Korea served twice as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1996 and 2014. Nevertheless, compared to the permanent members, the non-permanent members have a short term of two years and have no veto power. This confirms that the difference between South Korea and the United States is relatively large.

In sum, the alliance between South Korea and the United States is a clearly asymmetric relationship because of the difference between their economies, their military

<sup>54</sup> Source: "Military Expenditure Data.

<sup>55</sup> "Functions and Powers," United Nations Security Council, accessed September 8, 2019, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/functions-and-powers>.

powers, and their influence in the international system. Analyzing material power differences within an alliance is very meaningful. From the realist point of view, this difference in power is highly likely to stress the autonomy of a relatively weak state in bilateral alliance relations.

### C. SINO-SOUTH KOREAN RELATIONS

Since implementing its reform and opening-up policy in 1978, China has emerged as an economic power by continuing its rapid economic growth in the subsequent decades. In particular, the concept of “peace and development” has been consistently emphasized by China, which emphasizes “development” under the larger framework of world peace.<sup>56</sup> After reshuffling the leadership system at the Communist Party’s 13th Plenary Session in the fall of 1989, China actively promoted diplomatic relations with the West to break away from international isolation, restored its external image, and created an environment where it could focus on economic development.<sup>57</sup> China has also opened up a new era of diplomacy by expanding its multilateral and broad diplomacy with neighboring Asian countries including South Korea.

Seoul and Beijing signed formal diplomatic relations on August 24, 1992, about half a century after their ties were severed following the Korean War.<sup>58</sup> The diplomatic relations between South Korea and China are a significant turning point, as they have overcome different systems and ideologies and established formal diplomatic ties.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, South Korea and China have formed a strategic cooperative system as leaders of the two governments, parliaments, political parties, and the media have visited each other in major policy areas, including the summit talks.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Chul Jin Park, “The Exchange of the China’s Foreign Policy for Korea into Before and After Korea-China Amity” *The Journal of Northeast Asia studies* 21, no.1 (2006), 109–110.

<sup>57</sup> Park, 110–11.

<sup>58</sup> Hong Liu, “The Sino-South Korean Normalization: A Triangular Explanation.” *Asian Survey* 33, no. 11 (1993): 1083–1094. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2645001?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2645001?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>59</sup> Liu, 1083.

Since 1992 under Deng Xiaoping, China has emphasized economic construction as the country's first goal, and the Chinese leadership has adopted 'Creating a peaceful environment for domestic economic construction' as its foreign policy. The contents of this foreign policy include "developing friendly relations with neighboring countries," "strengthening cooperation with third countries," "strengthening relations with the West and developing economic relations," "strengthening UN diplomacy" and finally "peaceful resolution of international issues." Among these, "developing friendly relations with neighboring countries" became the main emphasis. The reason was that relations with neighboring countries directly affect China's economic, political, and security interests.<sup>60</sup>

Since 1992, relations between South Korea and China have made remarkable progress in many fields, including politics, economy, society, and culture. In May 2008, South Korea and China held a summit meeting with President Hu Jintao during President Lee's visit to China and raised officially bilateral relations from "full-scale cooperative partnership" to "Strategic Partnership."<sup>61</sup> Based on this fact, South Korea and China have given new meaning to building mutual relations and raised the relationship between the two countries to the strategic level, including cooperation in politics, economy, society, culture, and on the regional and international stage.

The Sino-South Korean relationship was a leap forward in the era of the Park Geun-Hye administration. A formal visit to South Korea by President Xi Jinping took place in July 2014. In 2015, President Park's visit to China during the China Victory Day parade, which was the first visit by a South Korean president, served as a very significant turning point in building bilateral relations.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Park, 109–121.

<sup>61</sup> Scott Snyder, "Sino-South Korean Strategic Partnership," *The Korea Times*, May 28, 2008, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/05/116\\_24904.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/05/116_24904.html).

<sup>62</sup> "Status of High-Level Personnel Exchanges between Korea and China," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Korea, accessed May 27, 2019. [http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/cn-ko/wpge/m\\_1225/contents.do](http://overseas.mofa.go.kr/cn-ko/wpge/m_1225/contents.do).

On June 2, 2015, South Korea's President Park Geun-Hye and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed officially on the South Korea-China Free Trade Agreement (FTA).<sup>63</sup> The discussion on the South Korea-China FTA started with an unofficial feasibility study on the China-ROK Free Trade Area of China's President Hu Jintao and South Korea's President Roh Moo-Hyun in November 2004. After 11 years, it took effect on December 11, 2015, with the approval of the Parliament. Under the agreement, South Korea eliminates tariffs on 92% of Chinese products within 20 years, and China abolishes tariffs on 91% of South Korean products.<sup>64</sup>

South Korean President Park said that the Korea-China FTA is a historical milestone for deepening the "Strategic Cooperative Partnership" between the two countries and serves as an institutional framework for future cooperation, and Chinese President Xi Jinping commented that the FTA would leap forward in bilateral trade relations, which would give substantial benefits to the people of both countries and would contribute to economic integration in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region and the development of the world economy.<sup>65</sup>

In terms of trade size, the Korea-China FTA was the largest FTA among China's FTAs, and the Korea-China FTA cover 17 sectors, including electronic commerce and government procurement as well as goods and services and investment and trade rules. Many Chinese experts welcomed the decision, saying that the FTA with South Korea is the highest-level free trade agreement among China's FTAs with other countries and that it would serve as a new growth engine for China and Korea.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> "Chinese President Xi Jinping and Korean President Park Geun-hye Exchange Congratulatory Letters on the Official Signing of the China-Korea FTA," Ministry of Commerce, PRC, accessed May 28, 2019. [http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/enarticle/enkorea/enkoreanews/201506/21937\\_1.html](http://fta.mofcom.gov.cn/enarticle/enkorea/enkoreanews/201506/21937_1.html).

<sup>64</sup> "Chinese President Xi Jinping and Korean President Park Geun-hye Exchange Congratulatory Letters on the Official Signing of the China-Korea FTA."

<sup>65</sup> "Chinese President Xi Jinping and Korean President Park Geun-hye Exchange Congratulatory Letters on the Official Signing of the China-Korea FTA."

<sup>66</sup> "Chinese President Xi Jinping and Korean President Park Geun-hye Exchange Congratulatory Letters on the Official Signing of the China-Korea FTA."

In sum, the relationship between Korea and China has become very close politically and economically. Politically, they established a cooperative relationship through an institutional framework, and economically, Korea became increasingly dependent on China. This economic dependence, like Park's claim, is likely to weigh heavily on Korea's autonomy if China's national interests are violated.<sup>67</sup>

#### **D. SOUTH KOREAN POLICY MAKING**

##### **1. Democracy and the Presidential System in South Korea**

Since democratization in 1987, democracy in Korea has grown very rapidly both quantitatively and qualitatively. The president was elected by a procedural presidential election, and the progressive regime peacefully replaced the conservative regime for the first time by the election of Kim Dae-Jung. The progressive regime, which had been in place for ten years, was likewise replaced by a conservative regime through a peaceful and procedural democracy. All of this went smoothly without the crisis of returning to authoritarianism, and there was no democratic decline during the two economic crises. Unlike other politically regressive countries, such as those in Central Asia and South America, despite achieving a procedural democracy, South Korea has established itself as a representative country of economic development and democracy.

The South Korean government has accepted forms of a presidential system since its founding. In the chaos of the revolution in April 1960, a nine-month parliamentary system was implemented, but the government soon returned to the authoritative presidential system. Bruce Harrison defines this Korean presidency as the "Imperial Presidency."<sup>68</sup> According to Harrison, as with other Asian countries, the president of South Korea has much power.<sup>69</sup> For example, the president has the power to neutralize the legislative powers of parliament because he can take the initiative to submit legislation guaranteed by the Constitution. The president can also involve lawmakers,

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<sup>67</sup> Park.

<sup>68</sup> Bruce Harrison, "Time for a Constitutional Change in South Korea?" *The Diplomat*, December 24, 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Harrison.

especially ruling parties, in the cabinet. The South Korean President has dominant power within that country's democratic system. Due to these characteristics, many people in South Korea are discussing the improvement of the presidential system. The presidential system of South Korea has the following characteristics.

First, the presidential system of South Korea is less likely to compromise. One shortcoming of the presidential system is that only one candidate and one party can win the presidential election. In this winner-take-all system, politics easily becomes a zero-sum game, making tolerance and compromise difficult. Because of this feature, political parties use all social and political issues as tools for fighting to take power and focus on fighting itself.<sup>70</sup>

Second, corruption is a bigger issue in South Korea, of course, partly as a feature of presidential systems in general (due to power concentration) but also in South Korea in particular. Ho-ki Kim claimed that an incompetent and irresponsible president could be elected within the South Korea presidential system.<sup>71</sup> In the presidency, the president is the sole executive with ultimate decision-making power, and professionalism and morality are essential. The presidency emphasizes the checks and balances between parliament and the government but places the ultimate authority of policy enforcement on a single president. Because of the high dependence on a single president, the direction of politics depends on the president's qualities and abilities, and the risk of sudden death or corruption of the president is great. For these reasons, corruption is a bigger problem in South Korea.

Third, the continuity of policy is limited in South Korea's presidential system.<sup>72</sup> This is because, according to the Constitution, successive re-elections are impossible in the presidential system of Korea. These institutional features cause South Korean presidents to push their agenda too quickly, creating much friction and conflict in society.

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<sup>70</sup> Harrison.

<sup>71</sup> Ho-ki Kim, "Out of the Shadows: The Collapse of Park Geun-Hye and the Future of South Korea," *Global Asia* 11, no.4 (2016): 85.

<sup>72</sup> Francis Fukuyama, Bjorn Dressel, and Boo-Seung Chang, "Facing the Perils of Presidentialism?," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 111.

The newly changed president is also able to overturn the previous president's policies. The emergence of a progressive regime due to the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye was very likely to influence the THAAD decision made by the Park Geun-hye administration.

## **2. Legacy of the President Park**

In 2013, Park Geun-hye began her term as president. She is the daughter of Park Chung-Hee, famous for being a dictator in South Korea. President Park Chung-Hee's authoritarianism was quite a famous case not only in Asia but also outside of Asia. His authoritarianism contributed much progress in the economy by showing the characteristics of the developmental state. He also established the Economy Planning Board (EPB), which led to economic development.<sup>73</sup> President Park's development model was to carry out planned economic development based on the power of a strong government. President Park Chung-Hee's development model achieved exceptional results, and equivalent economic growth rates are hard to find in the world history. This economic development continued to give him political legitimacy.<sup>74</sup>

Nonetheless, the Park Chung-Hee administration faced a political crisis as it entered 1972, worsening its trade balance and preventing local companies from exporting due to U.S. import restrictions.<sup>75</sup> To get out of the political predicament, Park Chung-Hee initiated a coup, consequently amending the constitution to make it possible for long-term power. This dictatorship lasted until he was assassinated.

Similar to her father's policy, President Park Geun-Hye argued that economic development was the top priority of the country, with an emphasis on promoting economic development plans.<sup>76</sup> Many people said that the expectation for economic

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<sup>73</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982)

<sup>74</sup> Alice Amsden, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>75</sup> Yong-Joo Lee, "A Study on the Legitimacy of Korea's Authoritarian Regime and Its Leadership," *The Korean Journal of Humanities and the Social Sciences*, no. 38 (May 2014).

<sup>76</sup> "President Park 2014 New Year Initiative."

development was the reason they chose her as president.<sup>77</sup> These findings reflect the public sentiment that the public expected her to perform like her father and produce similar outcomes.

However, the issue of political legitimacy continued to bother the new Park administration. Along with the launch of the Park Geun-Hye regime, controversy over election intervention by the National Intelligence Service occurred, which affected the legitimacy of the new president. In addition, the forced dissolution of political parties and the arrest of lawmakers led many experts to argue that South Korea's political system was returning to an authoritarian system.<sup>78</sup> Also, her governing style, represented by her lack of communication and conversation, was another strong comparison with her father.<sup>79</sup>

President Park Geun-hye's corruption using her personal acquaintance with Choi Soon-sil, which began in April 2016, disrupted the entire Korean society.<sup>80</sup> President Park eventually was impeached peacefully in December because of this scandal and resigned from office. Among the reasons for impeachment related to the scandal: 1) President Park made Choi Soon-sil engage in national policy and civil servants' personnel policy, and pursued Choi's private interests. 2) President Park forced *Chaebol* to give a bribe to Choi Soon-sil. President Park's corruption also influenced THAAD decisions, because people began to believe that her claims and opinions about THAAD were related to corruption.

## **E. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THE SOUTH KOREAN PUBLIC**

It was during the Kim Dae-Jung regime that public participation emerged as a new alternative to democracy rather than as representative of democracy in Korean society. The Kim Dae-Jung administration, which took power during the International

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<sup>77</sup> Lee.

<sup>78</sup> Lee.

<sup>79</sup> Lee.

<sup>80</sup> Kim, 85.



Monetary Fund (IMF) crisis, made a great compromise on the revision of labor law through the Korea Tripartite Committee, a form of social consensus.<sup>81</sup> This led to a new system in which representatives of interest groups representing the workers' and social sectors and government representatives gather in one place to reconcile interests with dialogue and compromise and to create policy alternatives. The emergence of this system was regarded as an extension of participatory democracy in that workers' groups, which had been excluded from the policy-making process, participated in the policy-making process with the same qualifications as employers' groups. This social consensus system remains as a decision-making body to solve class conflict.

The Roh Moo-Hyun government, which had a similar political tendency with the Kim Dae-Jung government, wanted to extend the scope of this system to civil society.<sup>82</sup> This period coincided with the collapse of the dominant role of newspapers and broadcasting in public opinion formation due to the popularization of the Internet. South Korea's 16th presidential election was so decisive that it showed the Internet had a crucial impact on the election results. The Internet has played an important role in attracting young voters to the political arena, which is overwhelmed by indifference and political aversion.<sup>83</sup>

Entering the Lee Myung-Bak administration, the dominant claim was that Korea's democracy has been stably consolidated at an institutional level.<sup>84</sup> This is because the political power has been continuously changed through elections. Unlike the progressive president, however, he continued to attempt to institutionally curb political participation of the public, questioning the assertion that democracy had been consolidated.<sup>85</sup> For

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<sup>81</sup> Seong Ku Hong, "The Acceptance of Deliberative Democracy in Korea: Radicalization of Liberalism and Expansion of Political Participation," *Korean Journal of Communication & Information* 96 (August 2019).

<sup>82</sup> Hong.

<sup>83</sup> Hong.

<sup>84</sup> Woo Jin Kang and Mun Gu Kang, "Lee Myung-bak Government and the Quality of Democracy in Korea – Focusing on Partial Regimes Approach," *Economy and Society* 104 (December 2014).

<sup>85</sup> Kang and Kang.

example, after the candlelight rally in 2008, the Lee Myung-Bak administration revised the law on public assembly and demonstrations, contributing to undermining the political rights of assembly.<sup>86</sup> Besides, the Lee Myung-Bak administration also attempted to enact a “group litigation law” to introduce a class action system that facilitates compensation for citizens who drive and sympathize with rallies or demonstrations.<sup>87</sup>

As the Park Geun-hye regime entered, the political participation of the people was carried out within a more active and institutional framework. This political crisis played out in a democratic and constitutional framework.<sup>88</sup> The people were angry at the Choi Soon-sil scandal, and through candlelight rallies expressed their anger over the president’s incompetence. This is the only South Korean impeachment case created within its institutional framework, following its procedures and peacefully removing the President from government. This indicates that Korean democracy has matured institutionally compared to previous cases.

## **F. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has summarized the background of the Korean Peninsula security environment from the perspective of the five main drivers the thesis is examining: North Korean nuclear and missile development, the U.S.-ROK military alliance, evolving relations between South Korea and China, the importance of presidential power in the current ROK government system, and the growing role of public opinion in South Korea’s consolidating democracy. The following two chapters examine more closely the roles of these factors in decision making on THAAD, first in the phase leading up to the ROK decision to deploy THAAD, and then in the phase between that decision and actual deployment.

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<sup>86</sup> Kang and Kang.

<sup>87</sup> Kang and Kang.

<sup>88</sup> President Park Geun-hye was South Korea’s second president impeached by the people. The first was during the April 19 revolution of 1960. At that time, violent and non-institutional methods were used to resolve the political crisis.

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### **III. SOUTH KOREA AND THE THAAD: FROM INITIATION TO DECISION**

This chapter examines five independent variables and how they led South Korea to decide to implement the THAAD system: 1) changes in pressure from the United States, 2) changes in pressure from China that were driving external structural changes in South Korea, 3) an increased nuclear threat by North Korea, 4) the influence of conservative South Korean policy-makers, and 5) the political participation of the public. The chapter depicts how these factors interacted with each other during the first phase of the THAAD story. It first traces South Korea's changing reaction and the interaction of the independent variables during critical events. It then analyzes possible causal relationships and the overall importance of each variable. For each key point in the sequence of events, the chapter provides a table summarizing which factor(s) drove outcomes, whether these factors served to accelerate or delay THAAD deployment, and what other factors were dependent on them.

The investigation finds that North Korea's increasing nuclear threat has contributed most to the THAAD decision of South Korea, followed by South Korea's policy-makers and changes in pressure from the United States and China. Among the domestic factors, the public participation factor does not affect the decision.

#### **A. FROM INITIATION OF THE THAAD TO THE DECISION**

##### **1. The Rodong Missile Launch by North Korea**

North Korea's Rodong missile test changed South Korea's response to THAAD for the first time. This was because of worries about South Korea's missile defense capability.

The THAAD issue began with remarks by U.S. Army Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti, commander of the USFK. He first expressed the need to deploy the THAAD system on

the Korean Peninsula at the hearing of the National Assembly in 2013.<sup>89</sup> The commander of the USFK is the highest authority of the ROK-U.S. alliance, and his claim was profoundly meaningful to the South Korean government and ROK forces.

Soon thereafter, on January 1, 2014, in the North Korean New Year's remarks, Kim Jong-Un insisted that "strong self-defense power will protect the country's sovereignty and peace," cementing his determination to increase the proportion of raw and other materials needed for economic development to cope with international pressure that was creating obstacles to developing nuclear weapons. In other words, he expressed to the international community the fact that he intended to further strengthen North Korea's nuclear weapon development will while maintaining North Korea's traditional economic framework and to concentrate on the continuous development of nuclear weapons.<sup>90</sup>

Unlike Kim Jong Un's wish, South Korean President Park emphasized the "economy" in her New Year's remarks and stated that peaceful unification is necessary for sustainable economic development. Her economic-centered arguments continued at a press conference on January 6, 2014, five days after her New Year's remarks, when President Park said that North Korea's nuclear threat, the biggest obstacle to unification and economic development in South Korea, could never be neglected. She argued that she would seek various ways to prevent North Korea's nuclear development and to completely abolish it.<sup>91</sup> Her statement spoke for South Korea's position, which meant that THAAD was one of the means to counter North Korean threats, but South Korea did not yet consider THAAD itself.

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<sup>89</sup> Heejun Kim, "*sa-tuTHAAD han-pan-to pay-chi non-lan-ss kwuk-ik-i wu-sen-i-ta*," [Controversy over the Deployment of THAAD on the Korean Peninsula... National Interest Comes First] *Korea Broadcasting Journalist Association* 24 (May 2015): 38–39.

<sup>90</sup> Sang-don Jeong, "*2014nyeon bug-han sin-nyeonsa-ui ham-ui-wa u-li-ui dae-eung-bang-hyang*," [The Implications of North Korea's New Year's Address in 2014 and the South's Countermeasures] *Korea Defense Issue & Analysis*, no. 1498 (14-3), (January 20, 2014): 3–4.  
<http://www.kida.re.kr/frt/board/frtNormalBoardDetail.do?sidx=382&idx=1548&depth=4>

<sup>91</sup> "President Park 2014 New Year Initiative," *Yonhap News*, January 6, 2014, accessed September 11, 2019, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20140106074300001>.

On February 13, 2014, a representative for the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) John Kirby said in a briefing that South Korea and the United States were discussing the THAAD deployment to the Korean Peninsula. Yet, shortly after the briefing, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense denied the agreement on the THAAD issue, saying that the official position of the United States did not constitute any decisions.<sup>92</sup> Such disclosure and “walking back” continued to increase confusion.

Meanwhile, North Korea reacted very sensitively to the South Korea-U.S. alliance’s drills on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea carried out a provocation, denouncing the annual U.S. and South Korean joint military exercise, which began on February 27, 2014, at the Kittaeryong missile base (see Figure 3). In addition, North Korea fired four SRBMs days after Key Resolve/Foal Eagle (KR/FE) began, heightening military tensions and expressing its disapproval of a nuclear-capable U.S. B-52 bomber flight that flew from South Korea in the same month.<sup>93</sup> North Korea had consistently condemned the OPLAN practice of the ROK-U.S. alliance, but contrary to North Korea’s expectations, South Korea had not significantly responded to the SRBM tests. South Korea even provided governmental humanitarian assistance to help North Korea address an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, and it expected to meet with North Korea after training with the United States.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the humanitarian help from South Korea, North Korea continued its missile tests: the SRBM launch on March 3, 2014, and the Rodong missiles launch on March 26, 2014. It was noteworthy that the missiles were launched at new locations, Wonsan Kalma International Airport and Sunchon Airbase, and the Rodong missile was launched for the first time since 2009.<sup>95</sup> The previous test launch was conducted at testing sites and focused on the development of missiles, but this test showed that

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<sup>92</sup> Kim, 38.

<sup>93</sup> Choonsik Yoo, “North Korea Fires Short-Range Missiles in Apparent Exercise,” *Reuters*, February 27, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-north-missiles-idUSBREA1Q0U520140227>.

<sup>94</sup> Yoo.

<sup>95</sup> “North Korea Test-Fires Mid-Range Missiles,” *BBC*, March 26, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-26743197>.

missiles could be launched from mobile facilities such as transporter-erector-launchers (TEL) in military operation areas such as airfields. Besides, North Korea changed the way to fire by increasing the firing angle rather than the distance.

The ROK-U.S. alliance had been concerned since North Korea tested the launch of Rodong missiles with a range of 1,300 km in a lofted trajectory manner. South Korea worried about whether its own missile defense could intercept a high-speed missile at the terminal phase given North Korea's new missile tactic.<sup>96</sup> Also, South Koreans reacted more sensitively to North Korea's missile launches that day as March 26, 2014, was the fourth anniversary of the sinking of a South Korean warship. Meanwhile, Seoul's Ministry of National Defense (MND) stepped up its criticism of the North's actions, referring to them as a "grave provocation."<sup>97</sup>

Table 3. The Rodong missile launch by North Korea.

<b>I.V.</b> \ <b>Assessment</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea's threat	Low	Accelerate	
United States			North Korea
China			
Policy-Maker			
Participation of the public			North Korea

## 2. South Korea's Strategic Ambiguity

China's THAAD anti-deployment efforts helped South Korea maintain strategic ambiguity in its THAAD policy and contributed to delaying the THAAD decision.

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<sup>96</sup> Toil Kim, "*ko-kak-pal-sa wa-mi-sa-il sa-tu-lo yo-kyek ka-nung-han-ka, kwun ham-kwu-ey non-lan?* [Is it Possible to Intercept a North Korean Missile?]," *Yonhap News*, July 21, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160721157051014>.

<sup>97</sup> "North Korea Test-Fires Mid-Range Missiles."

On June 3, 2014, Gen. Scaparrotti, USFK commander, repeatedly mentioned the THAAD deployment on the Korean Peninsula during a lecture at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses. In response, South Korea's defense minister told the National Assembly that he was not opposed to the THAAD deployment.<sup>98</sup> This was because the U.S. military's THAAD system, along with its existing Patriot missiles, would improve South Korea's capability to intercept North Korean ballistic missiles.<sup>99</sup> He maintained a vague position, however, arguing that THAAD was the property of the U.S. military and there was no justification for opposing the deployment of U.S. property to a U.S. military base in South Korea. This remark meant that he was in favor of deploying THAAD at the U.S. bases at the will of the United States, because he also considered this was not subject to the will of South Korea.

Meanwhile, North Korea continued to focus on the launch of the highly reliable SRBM and continuously changed the launch site. The SRBM was launched from Hodo on June 26, 2014, and three days later from Masikryong, located west of Wonsan Airport. The point of note was that the launch site had been constantly changed. (See Figure 4.) This change in North Korea was an important factor that reflected much strategic importance under the Kim Jong-Un regime, which caused much concern for the ROK-U.S. alliance. As the launch site was continually changed, the ROK-U.S. alliance would need to devote a great deal of attention and monitoring in advance to detect and identify missile launches, as for some launch experiments the alliance had failed to identify the exact location immediately after launch.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, South Korea's official response focused on surveillance and reconnaissance assets, and the response to THAAD remained unchanged.

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<sup>98</sup> Byongsu Park, "*kim-kwan-cin kwuk-pang ey-cwu-han-mi-kwun sa-tu pay-chi pan-tay an-hay-ey*," [Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin Says "We Do Not Oppose the Deployment of the THAAD"] *The Hankyoreh*, June 18, 2014, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/defense/643098.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Park.

<sup>100</sup> Shea Cotton, "Understanding North Korea's Missile Tests," Nuclear Threat Initiative, April 24, 2017, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/understanding-north-koreas-missile-tests/>.





Figure 3. North Korea's missile test sites in 2014.<sup>101</sup>

On July 3, 2014, China conveyed the idea that THAAD deployment hurts China's national interests, and so even leaders of that country expressed their opposition to the deployment. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, visited South Korea and conveyed his opposition to THAAD in person to President Park directly. At the South Korea-China summit held in Seoul, Chinese President Xi Jinping insisted that South Korea should express its opposition stance to the United States as a sovereign state so that the THAAD would not become a problem between South Korea and China, and asked South Korea's President Park Geun-Hye not to deploy the THAAD.<sup>102</sup> Despite China's efforts, South Korea's opposition to THAAD in the Sino-Korea joint statement

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<sup>101</sup> Source: Cotton.

<sup>102</sup> Park, "An Analysis on the South Korean 'Balanced Diplomacy in Northeast Asia' through the Controversy over the Deployment of the THAAD," 160.

was hard to find.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, China was able to obtain South Korea's commitment to official denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The South Korean government's response disappointed the hard-liners, who advocated for the return of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula again. In addition, on July 20, 2014, 15 days after the summit between South Korea and China, South Korea's newly appointed defense minister represented Seoul's position as if to consider China's concerns, similar to what his previous defense chief said at the National Assembly in June: "The THAAD is an asset to help South Korea's security, but it has not yet been reviewed."<sup>104</sup>

As soon as the South Korea-China summit ended, North Korea resumed its missile provocations from a location close to the South, where it moved westward and fired SRBMs from Hwangju. On July 12, 2014, the North fired SRBMs from Kaesong, very close to its border and less than 100 km from Seoul, further raising military tensions on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>105</sup> (See Figure 4.) After that, North Korea was silent, making no further launches until February 2015, after launching SRBMs on September 1 and 6, 2014.<sup>106</sup>

On October 3, 2014, South Korea's media made it public that the alliance was considering pushing for the deployment of the THAAD to the U.S. military base in Pyeongtaek regardless of China's concerns, giving rise to questions about Seoul's official response.<sup>107</sup> In fact, the official response from the defense minister of South Korea and that of the United States had always been that there was no "official consultation"

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<sup>103</sup> "Joint Statement on the Korea-China Summit," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, accessed October 23, 2019, [http://www.mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m\\_3973/view.do?seq=362047](http://www.mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m_3973/view.do?seq=362047).

<sup>104</sup> Hunki Kim, "*han-min-kwu kwuk-pang* 'wa, to-pal-si chey-cey sayng-con-kka-ci kak-o-hay-ya,'" [Defense Minister Han Min-gu "North Korea Prepares for Survival of Provocations"] *News Is*, July 20, 2014, accessed September 11, 2019, [http://www.newsis.com/ar\\_detail/view.html?ar\\_id=NISX20140720\\_0013058475&cID=10304&pID=10300](http://www.newsis.com/ar_detail/view.html?ar_id=NISX20140720_0013058475&cID=10304&pID=10300).

<sup>105</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>106</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>107</sup> Sang ho Yoon, "*han-mi, 2nyen-kan sa-tu- non-uy 10wel cen-cak-kwen cen-hwan-kwa pik-til ka-nung-seng*," [South Korea and the U.S. have been Discussing THAAD for Two Years. Transformation of Wartime Operational Control in October and the Possibility of a Big Deal], *The Dong-a Ilbo*, October 3, 2014, <http://www.donga.com/news/rel/article/all/20141003/66917278/1>.

regarding the deployment of the THAAD. It was also in conflict with the remarks of Robert Work, U.S. deputy secretary of defense: “We are carefully reviewing the deployment of the THAAD battery in South Korea and discussing it with the South Korean government.”<sup>108</sup>

Additionally, on October 23, 2014, at the 46th SCM, Chuck Hagel, the U.S. defense secretary, said he had not yet reached a formal decision regarding the THAAD deployment. Even so, he did not completely deny the possibility of deployment. At a joint press conference, Hagel stressed the U.S. commitment to providing missile defense capabilities to South Korea.<sup>109</sup>

Contrary to the wishes of the United States, South Korea’s President Park Geun-Hye did not mention the THAAD issue at all in an official position, instead focusing on solving economic problems. Similar to the New Year’s message in 2014, President Park insisted in the New Year’s message in 2015 that the urgent task would be to revitalize a somewhat stagnant economy.<sup>110</sup> She delayed these priorities by recognizing the issue of reunification with North Korea and the North Korean nuclear issue as a long-term assignment rather than an urgent task.

South Korea’s stance was the same at the 2015 New Year Press Conference. It started with worrying about the leak of documents related to President Park Geun-Hye’s corruption. Also, President Park Geun-Hye stressed the efforts to remove obstacles to growth by changing institutions and practices in order to make the economy improve. Based on these efforts, she asked the public for their continued interest in and support for the “Three Year Plan for Economic Innovation.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Yoon.

<sup>109</sup> United States’ Department of Defense, “The 46<sup>th</sup> ROK-US Security Consultative Meeting,” (Washington, DC: October 23, 2014), <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=759020>.

<sup>110</sup> Hyung seop Kim, “*pak-kun-hyey tay-thong-lyeng 2015nyen sin-nyen-sa*” [Park Geun-hye President in 2015, a New Year’s Message], *Joongang Ilbo*, December 31, 2014, <https://news.join.com/article/16825040>.

<sup>111</sup> “*pak-kun-hyey tay-thong-lyeng sin-nyen ki-ca-hoy-kyen mo-twu pal-en*” [Remarks by President Park Geun-hye New Year’s Press Conference], *The Hankyoreh*, January 12, 2015, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/bluehouse/673151.html>.

At the 2015 press conference of President Park Geun-Hye, it was difficult to find any reference to preparations for North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations.<sup>112</sup> As far as managing North Korea's provocations that impeded economic development, the emphasis was only on strengthening both the ROK-U.S. alliance and Sino-Korean relations as "Strategic and Cooperative Partnerships."<sup>113</sup> Nowhere was did she make any mention of military assets or THAAD to defend North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

In February 2015, Minister of National Defense Han Min-Koo used the term "strategic ambiguity" in connection with the THAAD issue at the National Assembly, which neither supported nor opposed the deployment of the U.S. THAAD system.<sup>114</sup> As a result, the government's ambiguous and unclear stance added to the confusion. South Korea's official position was that the THAAD deployment was neither considered nor discussed with the United States. To be more specific, the South Korean government did not have a plan to deploy the THAAD on the Korean Peninsula, but if it deployed, it would possibly help counter North Korean missile threats. It was also that South Korea did not have any particular objection to the USFK's deployment at the U.S. base. This unclear and ambiguous stance of Korea had added to the confusion not only at home but also internationally.

The South Korean leader was also indifferent to the ruling party's claim. Yoo Seung-Min, the ruling party floor leader, said that he would force a party-level publicization of the introduction of THAAD, further pressing the Blue House. The Blue House was consistent with the strategic ambiguity policy, defining the official opinion

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<sup>112</sup> *"pak-kun-hyey tay-thong-lyeng sin-nyen ki-ca-hoy-kyen mo-twu pal-en"* [Remarks by President Park Geun-hye New Year's Press Conference].

<sup>113</sup> *"pak-kun-hyey tay-thong-lyeng sin-nyen ki-ca-hoy-kyen mo-twu pal-en"* [Remarks by President Park Geun-hye New Year's Press Conference].

<sup>114</sup> Hojun Song, *"han-min-kwu "sa-tu, cen-lyak-cek mo-ho-seng phil-yo-han sang-hwang"* [Han Min-gu "THAAD, Strategic Ambiguity Necessary Situation"], *Yonhap News*, February 11, 2015, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20150211156300043>.

through spokesman Min Kyung-Wok as its “3NO (No Request, No Consultation, No Decision) policy” regarding THAAD issues.<sup>115</sup>

This strategy meant that the South Korean government had become aware that THAAD was needed. The ambiguous policy was an inevitable choice for a middle power state to manage the acquisition of security gains from the United States without disrupting economic gains from deepening relations with China.

Table 4. South Korea’s strategic ambiguity

<b>Assessment</b> <b>I.V.</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea’s threat			
United States			
China	Low	Delay	
Policy-Maker			China
Participation of the public			

### 3. North Korea’s Nuclear Test

China pressured South Korea through various diplomatic channels, and the United States pressured South Korea through several pipelines, but South Korea did not change its position on THAAD. Nevertheless, after North Korea’s nuclear test, South Korea’s position rapidly leaned toward the deployment of THAAD.

On March 16, 2015, China consistently raised its opposition to THAAD through several channels. After a meeting of vice foreign ministers of South Korea and China, the latter’s Deputy Director of Foreign Affairs Liu Zhenqiao expressed China’s concerns and worries in response to reporters’ questions regarding THAAD: “Please put importance on

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<sup>115</sup> Kyung hee Kim, “*sa-tu, ceng-pwu ip-cang-un 3NO*” [THAAD, the Government’s Position is 3NO.], *JoongAng Ilbo*, March 12, 2015, <https://news.joins.com/article/17333467>.

China's interest and concerns regarding the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense," and he urged, "I hope South Korea and the United States make a reasonable decision."<sup>116</sup> In addition, China's defense ministers openly expressed concern over the possible deployment of the THAAD to the Korean Peninsula during their defense ministers' talks.<sup>117</sup> Despite this persistent opposition, South Korea did not officially oppose THAAD. The ongoing pursuit of the "3No Policy" demonstrated this claim.

On April 3, 2015, North Korea continued to launch SRBMs from Hodo Peninsula, demonstrating its missile technology to the international community and suggesting that it was developing a missile that could more efficiently target and strike the U.S. and South Korean military bases on the Korean Peninsula through the increased number of launches.<sup>118</sup>

Meanwhile, the United States showed respect for South Korea's autonomy related to deploying THAAD, but also put pressure on it at the same time. On April 10, 2015, in Seoul, Secretary of State Ashton Carter denied discussing THAAD deployment after the South Korea-U.S. defense ministers' meeting. Nevertheless, later at the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, the U.S. commander in the Pacific Command (PACOM) noted that the United States was discussing the THAAD deployment in South Korea.<sup>119</sup> The South Korean government repeatedly argued through a spokesperson that there was no official request from the United States, no consultation, and no decision.<sup>120</sup>

On September 14, 2015, Kim Kwan-Jin, head of the presidential National Security Office, drew attention as he embarked on his first trip to the United States since taking office. He disclosed to the press that he would discuss the North Korean nuclear issue and pending issues with the United States during his official visit to the United

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<sup>116</sup> Kim.

<sup>117</sup> Kim.

<sup>118</sup> Choe, "North Korea Tests Five Missiles."

<sup>119</sup> Kim, 39.

<sup>120</sup> Kim.

States, which meant that a bilateral discussion on the THAAD issue would also be included.<sup>121</sup>

On September 18, 2015, China immediately pressed South Korea, claiming in a column by an international relations expert who served as head of the international department of the party's official newspaper, *Renminbao*, that Seoul should prevent damage to Beijing through the deployment of the U.S. MD. It also pointed out that the X-band radar could put China under the U.S. surveillance, and that South Korea was likely to be incorporated into the U.S.-led East Asian MD eventually.<sup>122</sup>

Since February 2015, after adhering to the “3No Policy” of South Korea, the stance on THAAD had not changed. North Korea's provocations had declined since February 2015, China had pressured South Korea through various diplomatic channels, and the United States pressured South Korea through several meetings and official comments, but South Korea did not change its position on THAAD.

On May 8, 2015, North Korea conducted a test launch of KN-11, Pukkuksong-1, a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) that when deployed could be launched from the sea and would be more difficult to detect than the ground-based missile.<sup>123</sup> Shortly after the test launch, the North's Rodong newspaper and the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) claimed that the development of KN-11 gave North Korea the ability to penetrate deeply into the enemy's territorial waters and strike suddenly without being detected by the enemy.<sup>124</sup> Nuclear weapons mounted on the SLBM were more threatening to all of Northeast Asia than to the Korean Peninsula because of their superior stealth and survivability compared to those of ground-based missiles. This was because

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<sup>121</sup> Yesung Moon, “*cwung-kwuk ceng-pwu na-se 'sa-tu han-kwuk nay to-ip'ey pan-tay mok-so-li nay-ya cwung-kwuk en-lon*” [The Chinese Government Should Voice Its Opposition to THAAD's Introduction in Korea...the Chinese Press], *Joongang Ilbo*, October 10, 2014, accessed September 11, 2019, <https://news.joins.com/article/16075022>.

<sup>122</sup> Moon.

<sup>123</sup> Will Ripley and Mariano Castillo, “Report: North Korea Tests Ballistic Missile,” *CNN*, May 9, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/05/08/asia/north-korea-missile-test/>.

<sup>124</sup> Ripley and Castillo.

“minimum deterrence” with the SLBM was possible.<sup>125</sup> In other words, as Tom Sauer argues, a country that seeks deterrence may have no ability to do more damage than its counterpart, but if it can do damage that can be expected to some extent, deterrence can be achieved despite its relatively weak capabilities.<sup>126</sup> Looking at North Korea’s problems from this perspective, it was evident that North Korea’s SLBM attack was inferior in terms of capability and power compared to the U.S. nuclear umbrella on the Korean Peninsula. Deterrence could be achieved, however, if the SLBM threat was enough to inhibit U.S. and ROK actions. Because of this deterrence capability, not only North Korea but also Britain and France are deploying nuclear weapons by making SLBMs.

In response to North Korea’s provocations, the ROK MND immediately informed the public that it perceived North Korea’s missiles as a South Korean crisis and threatened to retaliate if North Korea committed any invasion.<sup>127</sup> Still, official comments on THAAD were avoided.

At the same time, China repeatedly opposed the THAAD decision, paying keen attention to Seoul’s and Washington’s reactions after North Korea’s provocations. China was wary of South Korea’s response. China had a negative opinion on North Korea’s SLBM development capability and argued that South Korea should not be used as a pretext for THAAD deployment.<sup>128</sup> China, using expert opinions, stressed that North Korea did not have the capability to develop SLBM. Besides, they stressed that the countries that developed and owned SLBMs were only four states: the United States, Russia, France, and China.<sup>129</sup> It also argued that it was difficult for North Korea to have

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<sup>125</sup> Tom Sauer, *Eliminating Nuclear Weapons: The Role of Missile Defense* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>126</sup> Sauer.

<sup>127</sup> Ripley and Castillo.

<sup>128</sup> Junsam Lee, “*cwung-kwuk-en-lon, pwuk-han-uy ‘SLBM kay-pal-nung-lyek’ pwu-ceng-cek kwan-chuk*” [China’s Press, Negative on North Korea’s ‘SLBM Development Capability’], *Yonhap News*, May 12, 2015, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20150512195200083>.

<sup>129</sup> Lee.



SLBM capabilities at the level these countries had.<sup>130</sup> These arguments demonstrated that China was wary of South Korea's THAAD deployment gaining momentum under the threat of North Korean missiles.

Experts in the United States had put much analysis into the emergence of new threats from North Korea, and convinced that ultimately information sharing through the MD system was necessary. This assertion had given the power to deploy THAAD. The response from the United States experts was divided in favor of whether North Korea's SLBM was a real threat to its alliances. On the one hand, Bruce W. Bennett, the senior international defense researcher at the RAND Corporation, insisted that North Korea was far from a real threat because the development of SLBM would require a high level of technical verification process, and North Korea did not yet have more than 3,000 tons of submarines capable of launching SLBM.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, Bruce Klingner, the senior research fellow for Northeast Asia at The Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Center, clearly asserted that North Korea was developing the SLBM, and also argued, as did many experts, that the United States should respond quickly to North Korea's threats, in a matter of years rather than in ten or more years for deployment.<sup>132</sup> He emphasized the importance of multi-layered defense systems through THAAD and information sharing between Korea and Japan.

Meanwhile, North Korea test-launched the SLBM two more times on November 28 and December 25, 2015, and North Korea continued to show its commitment to the SLBM's development to the international community.<sup>133</sup>

South Korea and the United States were concerned about North Korean development of SLBM delivery means for nuclear weapons. This hostile action sparked the debate among many South Korean and the U.S. military experts, and China was also

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<sup>130</sup> Lee.

<sup>131</sup> Sang hyun Lee, "U.S. Experts Say North Korea Should be Wary of Over-Analysis of SLBM Threats," *Yonhap News*, May 12, 2015, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20150512032600014>.

<sup>132</sup> Lee.

<sup>133</sup> Missile Defense Project.

concerned about THAAD gaining momentum in response. Although South Korea acknowledged that it could be at risk due to the increased threat from North Korea, the South Korean government did not mention or change its position on the deployment of THAAD.

On January 6, 2016, North Korea announced that it had successfully tested the “hydrogen bomb” through its fourth nuclear test, and it would continue its policy of promoting both nuclear and economic development.<sup>134</sup> It also made clear that North Korea would not suspend or abandon its nuclear weapons program unless the United States halted its “hostile policy” against North Korea.<sup>135</sup> Some experts said the North’s claimed test of a hydrogen bomb was a failure given its nuclear-weapons explosive power of only 7–10 kilotons, which was lower than other hydrogen bombs or thermonuclear tests. Nevertheless, other experts argued that even if it was an experiment with less destructive power than a hydrogen bomb, it should be clearly recognized that North Korea was in the process of developing a hydrogen bomb.<sup>136</sup> While many experts discussed the extent to which North Korea’s nuclear test improved the country’s nuclear weapons production capacity, it should be clearly recognized that a failed nuclear test was still likely to provide useful information to the North Korea’s scientists to help them achieve that goal. The threat of North Korea’s nuclear program would only be heightened if it was achieved by testing a thermonuclear device or a two-phase explosion that had been tested only in the United States, Russia, France, and China.

Immediately after North Korea’s fourth nuclear test, China’s response was quite critical and immediate. On January 7, 2016, one day after the nuclear test, the Chinese government’s official position was announced by the Chinese Foreign Ministry representative Hua Chunying, who said, “We strongly oppose North Korea’s nuclear test,

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<sup>134</sup> Mary Beth D. Nikitin, “North Korea’s January 6, 2016, Nuclear Test,” Insight No. IN10428 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, January 7, 2016), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/IN10428.pdf>.

<sup>135</sup> Nikitin.

<sup>136</sup> Nikitin.

which is disadvantageous for the normal development of our bilateral relations.”<sup>137</sup> China’s position was repeated by Hong Lei on January 16, 2016. Hong Lei supported the UN Security Council’s stance against North Korea’s nuclear test and stated that it should implement denuclearization, prevent proliferation, and maintain peace in Northeast Asia.<sup>138</sup> China’s actual actions, however, were not significantly different from those after North Korea’s third nuclear test, and only repeated arguments for peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue through the Six-Party Talks, while maintaining a traditionally friendly relationship with North Korea.<sup>139</sup>

After North Korea’s nuclear test, South Korea’s position rapidly leaned toward the deployment of THAAD. In line with China’s criticism of North Korea, President Park Geun-Hye officially announced to the international community at the New Year’s press conference on January 13 that South Korea would review THAAD in accordance with South Korea’s security and national interests.<sup>140</sup> The President’s remarks declared the starting point for the official THAAD discussion in South Korea, which had been maintaining a strategic ambiguity through the “3No Policy.” It officially said President Park considered the deployment of the THAAD as a self-defense measure because the escalating threat from North Korea had too much impact on the survival of the South Korean people and the security of the nation.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> “2016 年 1 月 7 日外交部发言人华春莹主持例行记者会 [Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying’s Regular Press Conference on January 7, 2016],” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, January 7, 2016, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjdt\\_674879/fyrbt\\_674889/t1330170.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/t1330170.shtml).

<sup>138</sup> Shangwen Chen, Yuandan Guo and Huizhen Jin, “外交部：中方支持联合国安理会对朝鲜核试作出反应 [Ministry of Foreign Affairs: China Supports UN Security Council Response to North Korean Nuclear Test],” 环球时报, accessed September 15, 2019, <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/9CaKrnJTcT4>.

<sup>139</sup> Chen, Guo and Jin.

<sup>140</sup> Suchan Park and Nokyoung Jeong, “‘han-ban-do sa-deu’ ban-eung” [Korean Peninsula THAAD Reaction], *The Chosun Ilbo*, July 9, 2016, [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2016/07/09/2016070900250.html?Dep0=twitter&d=2016070900250](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2016/07/09/2016070900250.html?Dep0=twitter&d=2016070900250).

<sup>141</sup> Park and Jeong,

At the same time, the U.S. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report played a role in solidifying the U.S. position and indirectly conveying the U.S. opinion to South Korea. On January 19, 2016, THAAD deployments received momentum from the U.S. CSIS report. Because, according to CSIS's analysis, they recommended the U.S. DOD to deploy THAAD on the Korean Peninsula. CSIS's think tank concluded that the United States should strengthen regional MD capability through the deployment of THAAD.<sup>142</sup>

Meanwhile, domestic public opinion, which had remained silent despite the continued threat from North Korea, responded differently to North Korea's nuclear test, empowering politicians who advocated South Korea's nuclear armament. Public opinion among South Koreans also expressed concern about North Korea's nuclear development and the opinion that the North Korean nuclear issue should be dealt with through South Korea's nuclear armament rather than the ROK-U.S. alliance in order to balance power. According to a survey conducted from January 12 to 14, 2016, 54% of South Korean adults supported demands for ROK's nuclear armament.<sup>143</sup> Also, thanks to this momentum, Saenuri Party floor leader, Won Yoo-Chul, and Saenuri Party's Supreme Council member, Kim Eul-Dong, maintained that South Korea's nuclear armament was inevitable and that the fate of the state should no longer rely upon the U.S. promise.<sup>144</sup> This argument came from the ruling party and attracted much attention.

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<sup>142</sup> Green, Michael, Kathleen Hicks, and Mark F. Cancian. *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2025: Capabilities, Presence, and Partnerships* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/asia-pacific-rebalance-2025>.

<sup>143</sup> Whan-woo Yi, "NK Test Stirs Call for Nuclear Armament," *Korea Times*, January 18, 2016, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/01/180\\_195722.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/01/180_195722.html).

<sup>144</sup> Yi.

Table 5. North Korea's nuclear test.

<b>Assessment</b> <b>I.V.</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea's threat	High	Accelerate	
United States			North Korea
China			North Korea
Policy-Maker			North Korea
Participation of the public			North Korea

#### 4. President Park's Changed Perception of THAAD

After North Korea's nuclear test, China's passive attitude toward North Korea failed to meet the South Korean president's expectations, which contributed to the change in the South Korean president's perception of THAAD.

On February 5, 2016, one month after North Korea's nuclear test, Chinese President Xi Jinping called President Park Geun-Hye to discuss North Korea's long-range missile launch and sanctions against the North Korean regime, and he also discussed these same issues with President Barack Obama.<sup>145</sup> The telephone conversation between these nations' leaders, which had not occurred since North Korea's first nuclear test, and the U.S. and China's cooperation, was significant because it was the first time since the North Korea's fourth nuclear test. Nonetheless, it did not translate into sanctions on North Korea.

Despite these historical events, President Park was disappointed with Xi Jinping's attitude to deal with North Korea's nuclear and missile provocations, and expressed disappointment to the Blue House cabinet staff, saying, "Do not expect any more from

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<sup>145</sup> Dong hun Lee, "*si-cin-phing-ey sil-mang-han tay-thong-lyeng* 'l-yek-hal ki-tay mal-la'" [President Disappointed with Xi Jinping: "Don't Expect to Play a Role in China."], *The Chosun Ilbo*, February 13, 2016, [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2016/02/13/2016021300263.html?Dep0=twitter&d=2016021300263](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2016/02/13/2016021300263.html?Dep0=twitter&d=2016021300263).

China's role."<sup>146</sup> This was because China continued to be passive in sanctions against North Korea after North Korea's fourth nuclear test, and it was only a month after delaying South Korea's request for rapid conversation after the fourth nuclear test.<sup>147</sup> Besides, North Korea's alleged hydrogen bomb test caused a drastic change in the South Korean leader's attitude toward THAAD. The official remarks by President Park demonstrated this change, which declared the starting point for THAAD deployment. At the same time, it meant the annulment of the "3NO Policy."

Table 6. President Park's changed perception of THAAD.

<b>I.V. \ Assessment</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea's threat			
United States			
China			
Policy-Maker	High	Accelerate	
Participation of the public			

## 5. North Korea's Launch of Unha-3

After North Korea's nuclear test, its launch of Unha-3 helped further consolidate South Korea's decision. It inevitably provoked external factors, especially the United States and China, but did not affect the leader of South Korea. On the other hand, North Korea's provocations stimulated to the public, a domestic factor.

China continued to press South Korea over the fear of momentum from North Korea's aggressive provocation, but China could not overturn South Korea's decision. This was because of the following reasons: 1) China's passive stance toward North Korea

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<sup>146</sup> Lee.

<sup>147</sup> Lee.

and 2) China's adherence to the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue through the Six-Party Talks. Meanwhile, the United States waited for South Korea's decision, rather than pressuring South Korea or trampling its autonomy through official remarks or visits after North Korea's nuclear test.

On February 2, 2016, sudden notifications of North Korea's "Kwangmyongsong-4 satellite, Unha-3," launch again stimulated other countries in Northeast Asia. After the nuclear test, North Korea informed the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) of their satellite launch plans.<sup>148</sup> According to the IMO, North Korea was about to launch approximately one to three weeks later. Despite concerns in the United States and Northeast Asian countries, North Korea launched the Unha-3, long-range rocket, and Taepodong-2 on February 7, less than a month after the nuclear test, and the North Korean National Aerospace Development Administration announced that the satellite successfully entered its orbit.<sup>149</sup>

After North Korea's nuclear test, additional provocations of long-range missiles helped further consolidate South Korea's decision. South Korea's Defense Minister, Han Min-Gu, said in an emergency meeting held at the National Assembly following the launch of North Korea's long-range missiles, the ROK Department of National Defense would begin discussions with the USFK concerning THAAD. However, he said the formation of a formal consultative body or ROK-U.S. working group was not completed.<sup>150</sup> This was an opportunity to officially inform the lawmakers of the ROK's intentions and to display the ROK's growing willingness to deploy THAAD.

Meanwhile, North Korea's launch of Unha-3 provoked external factors, especially the United States and China, but did not affect the domestic factor, the leader of South

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<sup>148</sup> “这次真要上天: 朝鲜通报本月将发卫星 [The North Informed Us that This Month We Will Send Satellite to the Moon],” *环球时报*, February 3, 2016, <http://w.huanqiu.com/r/MV8wXzg0OTY4NjNfNDhfMTQ1NDQ2MDY2MA==>.

<sup>149</sup> “North Korea Fires Long-range Rocket despite Warning,” *BBC*, February 7, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35515207>.

<sup>150</sup> Shin young Lee, “*han-min-kwu “han-ps-mi, sa-tu pay-chi kong-sik hyep-uy wi-han hyep-uy cin-hayng-cwung* [Han, Min-Koo “South Korea and U.S. Talks underway for Official Consultation”], *Yonhap News*, February 18, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160218051000001>.

Korea. North Korea's provocations, however, had been a stimulus to the public, a domestic factor, and a survey conducted by MBC demonstrated these facts.<sup>151</sup> This public opinion also served as a source of political support for South Korea's leader, who talked THAAD in January.

North Korea's provocation of long-range missiles was a new security concern for the United States. The reasons for this were as follows: 1) North Korea's new provocation was aimed at the mainland of the United States, rather than at the Korean Peninsula. 2) There was controversy over re-entry technology, but this kind of repetitive experiment helped North Korea's technological development of ICBMs. (See Figure 4.) Due to these reasons, the United States had been keenly responding to the provocation since the announcement of North Korea's Unha-3(Taepodong-2) launch plan.



Figure 4. North Korea's Missile Range<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Jaejin Lee, "sa-tu-pay-chi chan-seng-i 70% [70% for THAAD Deployment? MBC Poll, Wrong Question.]," *Media Today*, February 11, 2015, <http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=127948>.

<sup>152</sup> Source: Nicole Mortillaro, "Just a Matter of Time': North Korea's Missile Capabilities May Be Closer than Once Thought," *CBC News*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/north-korea-missiles-reach-north-america-1.4424511>.



At the same time, the U.S. Department of State representative Kirby, referring to North Korea's "satellite" launch, insisted that the international community needed to put more pressure on North Korea.<sup>153</sup> In addition, Mr. Kirby pressured North Korea at a press conference, stating that the UN Security Council was considering further sanctions on North Korea and that the United States was considering sanctions on its own.<sup>154</sup>

Like the United States, China urged North Korea to suspend its "satellite" launch plan as tensions in Northeast Asia increased due to North Korea's nuclear test. Nevertheless, China's attitude did not contribute to the THAAD decision itself. China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lukang expressed concern in China over North Korea's "satellite" launch plan at a regular briefing while also expressing concerns over the deployment of THAAD in South Korea.<sup>155</sup> Through his official statement, China pressured both North Korea and South Korea at the same time. China judged that if North Korea again provoked the international community's attention with a nuclear test, it would give an essential card to hard-liners in the United States, South Korea, and Japan.

South Korea's leader was less talkative in responding to North Korea's new provocations, but the public supported THAAD. A Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) survey showed that South Korean public opinion had been leaning more toward THAAD deployment. According to MBC's survey, 67.8 % of the people agreed to the need for THAAD deployment on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>156</sup> These results had drawn attention to public opinion that could be seen amid North Korea's continued threats.

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<sup>153</sup> “这次真要上天: 朝鲜通报本月将发卫星 [The North Informed Us that This Month We Will Send Satellite to the Moon].”

<sup>154</sup> “这次真要上天: 朝鲜通报本月将发卫星 [The North Informed Us that This Month We Will Send Satellite to the Moon].”

<sup>155</sup> Kyungjin Shin, “China's Global Times Said North Korea's Satellite Will be Paid at a New Price,” *JoongAng Ilbo*, February 4, 2016, <https://news.joins.com/article/19529133>.

<sup>156</sup> Lee.

Table 7. North Korea's launch of Unha-3.

<b>Assessment</b> <b>I.V.</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea's threat	Low	Accelerate	
United States			North Korea
China			North Korea
Policy-Maker			
Participation of the public			North Korea

## 6. The ROK-U.S. Alliance's THAAD Decision

China and the United States sought to use the pending THAAD decision for mutual strategic interests. On the one hand, the United States tried to pressure China to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue, and on the other, it sought to deploy THAAD through cooperation with South Korea. China tried to pressure South Korea directly to withdraw the deployment of THAAD. But, the South Korean government did not change its decision posture regarding THAAD.

On February 7, South Korea and the United States announced publicly that they would officially begin discussions on South Korea's THAAD deployment.<sup>157</sup> Considering China's concerns regarding THAAD, the U.S. DOD notified China in advance before the announcement. It made clear that THAAD would only be used to intercept North Korean missiles.<sup>158</sup>

At the same time, South Korean Deputy Minister for Defense Policy Ryu Je-Seung argued that the deployment of THAAD, the most advanced defensive weapon currently available to North Korea's continuing nuclear and missile threats, should be

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<sup>157</sup> Taehoon Kim, "Used Only to Intercept North Korea," SBS, video, 1:39 (February 7, 2016), <https://m.news.naver.com/hotissue/read.nhn?sid1=100&cid=1035758&iid=49100248&oid=055&aid=0000375723>.

<sup>158</sup> Kim.

taken into account.<sup>159</sup> This was because a single THAAD battery could defend a large area of South Korea. At the same time, he tried not to provoke China, clearly stressing that it was brought by the USFK, not by South Korea buying and using the THAAD.<sup>160</sup>

After announcing official discussion, President Park also showed active support for the MND's stance on THAAD, and a Blue House foreign affairs official claimed that President Park's sense of disappointment and anger toward China, which had built trust through participation in the China Victory Day Parade in 2015 despite the U.S. concerns, played a significant role in the shift in perception.<sup>161</sup>

Meanwhile, public opinion had been in favor of THAAD deployment, which led leaders to add political power to the domestic controversy over THAAD. Yet, there had been no in-depth discussion of the THAAD deployment area. As the THAAD deployment discussion had risen to the surface, Pyeongtaek, Daegu, Chilgok, and Wonju were considered as the deployment sites; among them, Daegu was known to be the most likely location to deploy the THAAD.<sup>162</sup> Even as politicians of the ruling Saenuri Party and citizens of candidate sites maintained their support for the deployment, the deployment of the THAAD had begun to be passed on to other regions. Unfortunately, because the candidates for the THAAD deployment were the districts of the ruling party legislators, the Saenuri parliamentarians had difficulty supporting the government's position unconditionally.<sup>163</sup>

According to Cheong Seong-Chang, a senior research fellow at Sejong Institute in South Korea, the reason for this happening was that Seoul and Washington approached the THAAD problem differently. In detail, while the United States tried to take a flexible approach with the intention of opening up the possibility of compromise with China,

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<sup>159</sup> "North Korea Fires Long-Range Rocket Despite Warning."

<sup>160</sup> "North Korea Fires Long-Range Rocket Despite Warning."

<sup>161</sup> Lee, "*si-cin-phing-ey sil-mang-han tay-thong-lyeng* 'l-yek-hal ki-tay mal-la' [President Disappointed with Xi Jinping: Don't Expect to Play a Role in China]."

<sup>162</sup> Yong weon Yu, "U.S. to Deploy THAAD Battery in Korea This Year," *The Chosun Ilbo*, February 11, 2016, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2016/02/11/2016021101619.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2016/02/11/2016021101619.html).

<sup>163</sup> Yu.

South Korea desperately intended to deploy THAAD.<sup>164</sup> For example, on February 23, 2016, before the launch of the ROK-U.S. Joint Working Group, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said that “THAAD deployment has not yet been decided,” and asserted that THAAD would be not necessary if China appeared to be a bit more responsible for North Korea’s denuclearization after a meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China.<sup>165</sup> Additionally, at a press conference held on February 25, 2016, in the U.S. DOD, Harry B. Harris Jr., Commander, U.S. PACOM, said that a formal discussion between the United States and the ROK on THAAD deployment did not necessarily mean that it should be deployed.<sup>166</sup> His remarks meant that the deployment of THAAD had not yet been decided, and South Korea’s concerns deepened.

As the ROK-U.S. discussions of THAAD deployments were formalized, China began to voice its opposition in a stronger tone. First of all, Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister, even used the word “revenge” to claim that South Korea was threatening China with a knife backed by the United States.<sup>167</sup> He argued that THAAD was aiming at China and voiced that China’s legitimate security interests must be guaranteed in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue.<sup>168</sup> Second, Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui, who attended a high-level South Korea-China diplomatic strategy conference in Seoul, expressed clear opposition from China on the grounds that South Korea’s decision on THAAD increased tensions in East Asia and undermined China’s strategic security

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<sup>164</sup> Min-sik Yoon, “Korea, U.S. Launch Formal THAAD Talks,” *The Korea Herald*, March 4, 2016, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160304000689>.

<sup>165</sup> Byungsoo Park, “*mi-kwuk sa-tu pay-chi a-cik kyel-ceng an-twayss-ta han-kwuk o-li-al- toy-na* [U.S. “The THAAD Deployment Has Yet to be Decided.” Is Korea a Duck Egg?],” *The Hankyoreh*, February 24, 2016. <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/defense/731948.html>.

<sup>166</sup> “Department of Defense Press Briefing by Adm. Harris in the Pentagon Briefing Room,” U.S. Department of Defense, February 25, 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/673426/departments-of-defense-press-briefing-by-adm-harris-in-the-pentagon-briefing-room/>.

<sup>167</sup> Yong Hyun Ahn, “*sa-tu-nun yu-pang-ul kye-nwu-nun hang-wu-uy khal-chwum* [The Sword Dance of the Harbor at Which the THAAD Is Aimed at the Breast],” *The Chosun Ilbo*, February 15, 2016, [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2016/02/15/2016021500249.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2016/02/15/2016021500249.html).

<sup>168</sup> Ahn.

interests.<sup>169</sup> Third, China, citing the opinions of air force experts, argued that China's space activity would be monitored by the U.S. military assets in South Korea. In other words, it was a direct security threat to China, and they claimed that the potential threat posed by the U.S. military following the deployment of the THAAD seriously undermined the strategic balance of East Asia.<sup>170</sup> The reason was that if the United States pushed ahead with the deployment of the THAAD system in South Korea based on its ballistic missile strike capabilities to create a complete chain of MD in East Asia, it would significantly weaken China's nuclear deterrence capability.<sup>171</sup> In short, it would lead to the U.S. unilateral strategic dominance in East Asia.<sup>172</sup>

Until February 23, 2016, due to strong opposition from China, South Korea and the United States were hesitant to prepare for THAAD deployment. South Korea and the United States had not launched a ROK-U.S. Joint Working Group for more than two weeks after the declaration of formal consultations on THAAD deployment. Finally, it was planned to sign the ROK-U.S. Joint Working Group agreement on February 23, 2016, but it was canceled due to opposition from the United States just hours before the announcement of the official talks.<sup>173</sup> China's leader, Xi Jinping, attended the fourth Nuclear Security Summit in Washington and held summit talks with the U.S. President Obama. At this point, Xi Jinping conveyed to the U.S. President his opposition to the deployment of the THAAD system in South Korea, putting the issue of South Korea's

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<sup>169</sup> Wang Jiahui, “中方反对在韩国部署“萨德”反导系统 [China Opposes the Deployment of THAAD System in South Korea, “Liberation Army Daily”],” *解放军报*, February 16, 2016, [http://www.81.cn/jwgz/2016-02/16/content\\_6913654.htm](http://www.81.cn/jwgz/2016-02/16/content_6913654.htm).

<sup>170</sup> Wenchang Zhang, “空军专家: “萨德” 部署成功我航天活动将被监视 [Air Force Experts: If “THAAD” Is Deployed Successfully, It Will Be Able to Monitor Our Space Activities],” *解放军报*, February 18, 2016, [http://www.81.cn/jwgz/2016-02/18/content\\_6918106.htm](http://www.81.cn/jwgz/2016-02/18/content_6918106.htm).

<sup>171</sup> Zhang.

<sup>172</sup> Zhang.

<sup>173</sup> Park.

THAAD deployment on the main agenda.<sup>174</sup> It was the first time Xi Jinping expressed his opposition in an official position.

On March 4, 2016, despite hesitation from the United States, South Korea and the United States exchanged agreements to form a joint working group on THAAD deployment.<sup>175</sup> After signing the agreement, the joint working group immediately met to discuss the location of THAAD, safety issues, cost-sharing, and the timeline for further talks.

On March 10, 2016, six days after the U.S. and South Korean THAAD discussions began in earnest, North Korea launched two SRBMs over the East Sea and announced that it would liquidate all South Korean assets in the country.<sup>176</sup> Pyongyang spoke in a speech by the spokesman for the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK), which claimed that it would completely liquidate all assets of South Korean companies and related institutions in North Korea. North Korea also sought to inflict further political, military, and economic damage on South Korea.<sup>177</sup> Military provocations continued as if to prove their claim. On March 18, North Korea launched two medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBM), the Rodong missiles, from Sunchon Airbase.<sup>178</sup>

In April 2016, though North Korea's Musudan missiles test failed repeatedly, it was enough to stimulate the security efforts of neighboring countries. North Korea concentrated on the test of the Musudan missile, but the initial April 15 and 28 tests failed. In addition, the April 23 SLBM experiment only carried 19 miles, too short to be a success.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Seungheon Lee, "*sijinping, obama myeonjeonseo sadeuandwae* [Xi Jinping, Don't Buy It in Front of Obama]," *The Dong-a Ilbo*, April 2, 2016, <http://news.donga.com/3/all/20160402/77352014/1>.

<sup>175</sup> Yoon.

<sup>176</sup> Sang Hyun Lee, "North Korea Declares 'Full Clearance of All South Korean Assets,'" *Yonhap News*, March 10, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160310092952014>.

<sup>177</sup> Lee.

<sup>178</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>179</sup> Missile Defense Project.

Although China's Wang Yi, Zhan Yesui, and others strongly expressed China's opposition to the THAAD, and the United States tried to use it as leverage against North Korea's denuclearization rather than actively supporting South Korea's THAAD deployment, the South Korean government did not change its decision posture regarding THAAD.

On June 4, 2016, South Korea's Minister of National Defense, Min-Koo Han, while attending the Asian Security Conference in Singapore, formally informed the media of Seoul's intention to deploy the THAAD. He insisted that the ROK's missile defense assets were focused solely on defending the lower layers, which would be useful militarily if THAAD were deployed. This was because THAAD would make South Korea's multi-layered missile defense capability possible.<sup>180</sup> He implied that issues related to the THAAD deployment would be announced soon, saying that South Korea and the United States were jointly reviewing the location, timing, and cost of the deployment.

Meanwhile, North Korea continued to launch Musudan missiles, threatening not only the Korean Peninsula but also Japan. North Korea continued to focus on Musudan missile tests in June but failed to show significant results to the international community. In the midst of failure, the second of the Musudan missiles launched on June 22, 2016, the missile flew 249 miles, which was farther than the previous missiles, and dropped into the East Sea.<sup>181</sup> The South Korean government briefed the people in response to North Korea's provocations, but there was no mention of the THAAD timeline.

Immediately, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe strongly protested that North Korea's provocations harmed Japan's security, and Dave Benham of the U.S. PACOM argued that North Korean missiles were not a threat to North America.<sup>182</sup> These

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<sup>180</sup> "han-min-kwu "sa-tu pay-chi uy-ci pwun-myeng-hi ka-ci-ko iss-e" ["Han Min-koo Clearly Has the Will to Deploy THAAD"], *Yonhap News*, July 4, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160604036900014>.

<sup>181</sup> Barbara Starr, Madison Park, and Jung-eun Kim, "North Korea Fires Two Missiles, South Korea Says," *CNN*, June 22, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/21/asia/north-korea-missile/>.

<sup>182</sup> Starr, Park, and Kim.

comments, in turn, revealed that North Korea's ongoing missile tests were affecting Japan and the U.S. security and that both countries were concerned about the possibility of North Korean missiles reaching their territory.<sup>183</sup>

On July 8, 2016, South Korea and the United States, after much discussion, finally decided to deploy THAAD on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>184</sup> Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, the commander of USFK, said the THAAD placement decision was a significant decision for the alliance that has continued since the Korean War. At the same time, he noted that the driving force for this decision was the continued development of North Korean ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction.<sup>185</sup> He also made clear that THAAD would be focused solely on North Korea, taking into account China's concerns. Nonetheless, it was still unsettling for the people of the deployment candidate sites that the only considerations for the location of the THAAD system would be ensuring the utility, environment, health, and safety of the THAAD system.<sup>186</sup>

After its decision, China immediately requested through a diplomatic statement that the deployment of this system be halted. China claimed this was because the capabilities of AN/TPY-2 X-Band Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) radar systems, which are part of the THAAD system, exceed the capabilities needed to defend the Korean Peninsula, and the deployment of THAAD would enhance the U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities around the Korean Peninsula.<sup>187</sup>

Also, North Korea was very sensitive to sanctions by the United States. The THAAD announcement came shortly after the United States put North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un on the new sanction list for the first time, and the North's reaction was

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<sup>183</sup> Starr, Park, and Kim.

<sup>184</sup> Ankit Panda, "It's Official: The United States and South Korea Agree to Deploy THAAD," *The Diplomat*, July 8, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/its-official-the-united-states-and-south-korea-agree-to-deploy-thaad/>.

<sup>185</sup> Panda.

<sup>186</sup> Panda.

<sup>187</sup> Panda.



naturally intense. The North's KCNA news agency said North Korea recognized the sanctions list upgrade as a "declaration of war with North Korea."<sup>188</sup>

The active support of the leader played an essential role in THAAD's decision, but questions were raised about the decision-making process. Kim Jong-Dae, a member of the South Korea National Assembly, claimed that the decision was made through direct contact between the Blue House National Security Office and the USFK without going through the Defense Ministry.<sup>189</sup> He released the fact that he had met and spoke with the MND and announced that Blue House had a National Security Council (NSC) Standing Committee and decided on THAAD deployment urgently.<sup>190</sup> This indicated that President Park's will was deeply involved in the THAAD deployment decision, and it was evidence that Park's administration dealt directly with the United States, not taking the decision of THAAD deployment through a wide range of discussions with specialized institutions.

Despite China's continued opposition, South Korea decided to deploy THAAD. Its decision-making process, however, caused controversy. The indications that the final decision was made solely at the presidential level, without participation of other governmental institutions, indicates how leadership preference played a critical role in the decision.

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<sup>188</sup> Panda.

<sup>189</sup> "*kim-cong-tay "sa-tu pay-chi, tay-thong-lyeng cha-wen-ey-se cik-cep kyel-ceng-han kes"* [Kim Jong-dae Said, "Deployment of THAAD, a Decision Made by the President Himself"], *Joongang Ilbo*, July 8, 2016, <https://news.join.com/article/20281299>.

<sup>190</sup> "*kim-cong-tay "sa-tu pay-chi, tay-thong-lyeng cha-wen-ey-se cik-cep kyel-ceng-han kes"* [Kim Jong-dae said, "Deployment of THAAD, a Decision Made by the President Himself"].

Table 8. THAAD decision by the ROK-U.S. alliance.

<b>I.V.</b> \ <b>Assessment</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea's threat	Low	Accelerate	
United States			
China			
Policy-Maker	High	Accelerate	United States
Participation of the public			

## B. CONCLUSION OF THE FIRST PHASE

This chapter focused on South Korea's THAAD decision and has identified which factors influenced its decision from the time the THAAD debate began in South Korea to the deployment decision. The conclusion of this chapter is summarized in Table 9. North Korea's nuclear threat most affected South Korea's THAAD decision, followed by South Korea's policy-makers and changes in pressure from the United States and China. On the other hand, it appears that the political participation of the public contributed little to the decision among the domestic factors.

The first primary conclusion is that South Korea's THAAD decision was most affected by North Korea's nuclear threat. The increasing threat from North Korea presented security concerns to the South Korean government, and had been a factor in stimulating the United States to put pressure on South Korea. To reach this conclusion, this chapter first looked at North Korea's nuclear ambition before the controversy began and, based on its starting point, examined North Korea's ongoing threat changes under the Kim Jong Un regime and South Korea's response.

Table 9. Analysis of the first phase.

	External Factors			Domestic Factors	
1 <sup>st</sup> Phase	N. Korea	U.S.	China	Leader	Public
Rodong Test	Accelerate →	→			→
Strategic Ambiguity			Delay →	→	
Nuclear Test	Accelerate →	→	→	→	→
Leader's perception				Accelerate	
Unha-3 Launch	Accelerate →	→	→		→
THAAD Decision	Accelerate →			Accelerate →	

Key: In the table, red: high, yellow: low, →: dependence

North Korea had increased its provocations through nuclear and missile tests, which threatened the United States as well as South Korea, since 2014 when THAAD discussions began in earnest. The rapid increase in these threats prompted the United States to continue to pressure South Korea's resolve and autonomy in an asymmetric alliance. Besides, these persistent and rapidly increasing North Korean nuclear and missile threats contributed to the THAAD decision.

As discussed previously, under the Kim Jong-Un regime, North Korea conducted 18 nuclear and missile launches in 2014 and 2015, and 23 in 2016, until the decision to deploy THAAD. This number is almost the same as the sum of 63 launches under the Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-Il regimes.<sup>191</sup> These numbers are much higher when combined with Kim Jong-Un's early days of 2012 and 2013. Kim Jong-Un further strengthened his will to develop nuclear weapons through a nuclear test, and as a result, the number of 10 to 16 estimated weapons in 2014 increased to 14 to 22 in 2016.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>191</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>192</sup> David Albright and Serena Kelleher-Vergantini, "Plutonium, Tritium, and Highly Enriched Uranium Production at the Yongbyon Nuclear Site: North Korea's Nuclear Arsenal May Be Growing Significantly," Institute for Science and International Security, June 14, 2016, [http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Pu\\_HEU\\_and\\_tritium\\_production\\_at\\_Yongbyon\\_June\\_14\\_2016\\_FINAL.pdf](http://isis-online.org/uploads/isis-reports/documents/Pu_HEU_and_tritium_production_at_Yongbyon_June_14_2016_FINAL.pdf).

In addition, North Korea's Kim Jong-Un made efforts to miniaturize and lighten the nuclear warheads. Along with these efforts, in order to develop its capabilities, North Korea conducted many tests of the Rodong with a range of 1,200 to 1,500 km, Musudan of 2,500 to 4,000 km, and Taeposong-2 of 4,000 to 15,000 km.

Additionally, since 2015, the test launches of SLBMs have continued to increase the tension on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>193</sup> Concerns about North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities has continued not only within the Korean Peninsula but also aimed at the U.S. mainland. In March 2016, the U.S. Admiral William Gortney, commander of U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM), cited concerns about North Korea's missile capability in Congress, insisting that Hwasung-13, KN-08, could pose a nuclear threat to many parts of the United States.<sup>194</sup>

Additionally, entering 2014, North Korea drastically modified its missile-testing pattern, firing far more often and launching from various places.<sup>195</sup> Looking more closely, one notes that North Korea created many testing sites elsewhere for developmental testing of missiles, without using the existing frequently used the Tonghae Satellite Launching Ground. Furthermore, unlike during the Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il regimes, operational tests were conducted at multiple military operation bases rather than focusing on missile development only.<sup>196</sup> This change in North Korea is an essential factor that shows the strategic importance of the development program under the Kim Jong-Un regime, which has caused much concern for the ROK-U.S. alliance. This is due to the fact that as the launch site is continually changed, it requires a great deal of attention and monitoring in advance for the ROK-U.S. alliance to detect and identify

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<sup>193</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>194</sup> Terence Roehrig, "The U.S. Nuclear Umbrella over South Korea: Nuclear Weapons and Extended Deterrence," *Political Science Quarterly* 132, no. 4 (2017): 670, doi: 10.1002/polq.12702.

<sup>195</sup> Cotton.

<sup>196</sup> Cotton.

missile launches, and the alliance has failed to identify the exact location of some launch experiments immediately after launch.<sup>197</sup>

The second primary conclusion is that South Korea continued to delay THAAD's formal discussion with the United States due to South Korea's political and economic relations with China. Nevertheless, the immediate threat from North Korea overrode external pressure from China. According to realists, the deployment of THAAD is a form of external balance. This is because THAAD is the property of the United States, operated by U.S. military order, and represents the commitment of the extended deterrence promised by the United States. The rapid increase in North Korea's threats put pressure on South Korea in the asymmetric ROK-U.S. alliance described earlier, with the U.S. officials' talks about THAAD, visits by senior U.S. government officials, and the need for missile defense expressed by U.S. military generals. Eventually, in the asymmetrical alliance structure between South Korea and the United States, U.S. demand for THAAD deployment would influence South Korea's decision to deploy THAAD. If South Korea did not meet the THAAD deployment desired by the United States, it could increase the risk of weakening the alliance relationship with the United States, and increase the possibility of abandonment by the United States.

China judged that the X-Band radar mounted on the THAAD could be aimed at China, and continuously expressed its interests and concern regarding its deployment on the Korean Peninsula. Even China's Xi Jinping was serious enough to talk directly to President Park Geun-Hye and to the president of the United States. In response to China's continued expression of concern, South Korea maintained strategic ambiguity with its "3No Policy," but that stance did not last long. In addition, unlike the South Korean and U.S. perceptions and concerns after North Korea's nuclear test, China did not show any change in its position to peacefully resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in the framework of the existing Six-Party Talks. Finally, South Korean President Park Geun-Hye, who had expected a change in China's role in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, was disappointed and began to discuss the THAAD in earnest.

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<sup>197</sup> Cotton.

The third primary conclusion is that South Korea's conservative regime, led by President Park Geun-Hye, changed its perception of national interests through the policy of strategic ambiguity, contributing much to the decision of THAAD. This is because the president has the greatest authority in the decision-making process in South Korea. The comments of the leader who supported the deployment of THAAD rapidly after North Korea's nuclear test support this assertion. To understand the South Korean government's decision, it is necessary to analyze President Park's perception of North Korea's nuclear and missile issues. There is no reference to THAAD in the official statements of President Park Geun-Hye in 2014 and 2015. It was the New Year's press conference on January 13, 2016, when Park's administration first mentioned both THAAD and North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. President Park Geun-Hye officially stated, "We will consider North Korea's nuclear and missile threats and consider THAAD issues according to our security and national interests."<sup>198</sup> The Blue House's position on the deployment of THAAD, which had been consistent with the strategic ambiguity of policy with the "3NO Policy" on this issue until the end of 2015, officially began to change as it entered 2016.<sup>199</sup> The change in the decision-maker's threat perception served as a significant turning point for the United States and South Korea to begin formal consultations on the deployment of THAAD on February 7, 2016.<sup>200</sup>

After deciding to deploy THAAD on July 21, 2016, President Park Geun-Hye presided over the NSC and stated, "If there are other ways to protect our people from North Korean missile attacks besides THAAD deployment, please suggest."<sup>201</sup> These arguments represent the Park Geun-Hye administration's changing threat perception,

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<sup>198</sup> "*bag dae-tong-lyeong "an-bo gug-ig tta-la sa-deu-bae-chi geom-to,"*" [President Park "Consider the Deployment of THAAD in accordance with National Security and National Interests.'], *KBS*, video, 1:38 (January 13, 2016), <http://mn.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=3215004>.

<sup>199</sup> Jack Kim, "Between U.S. and China, South Korea in Bind over Missile Defense," *Reuters*, March 17, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-usa-missiles/between-u-s-and-china-south-korea-in-bind-over-missile-defense-idUSKBN0MD0UP20150317>.

<sup>200</sup> Anna Fifield, "South Korea, U.S. to Start Talks on Anti-Missile System," *The Washington Post*, February 7, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/south-korea-united-states-to-start-talks-on-thaad-anti-missile-system/2016/02/07/1eaf2df8-9dc4-45e3-8ff1-d76a25673dbe\\_story.html?noredirect=on](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/south-korea-united-states-to-start-talks-on-thaad-anti-missile-system/2016/02/07/1eaf2df8-9dc4-45e3-8ff1-d76a25673dbe_story.html?noredirect=on).

<sup>201</sup> Fifield.

which means she recognized the fact that not only North Korea's threat had increased significantly, but the reliability of North Korean missile threat had also increased.

In summary, North Korea's nuclear and missile threats increased very rapidly from 2014 to 2016, and North Korea's fourth nuclear test led to a shift in the South Korean government's position on THAAD. Despite the dynamic security environment in East Asia, China was concerned about the U.S. assets being placed on the Korean Peninsula rather than resolving North Korea issues. In order to change China's attitude, South Korea and the United States strategically delayed the decision on THAAD, but in response to China's passive attitude toward North Korea, the United States and South Korea inevitably played the THAAD card. North Korea's continued nuclear and missile provocations led to South Korea's need for external balance through the U.S. nuclear umbrella despite reliability factors and justification for its internal balance. These factors drove South Korea's decision to adopt THAAD. President Park Geun-Hye's shift in perception after North Korea's nuclear test highly influenced this outcome. The accumulation of these effects led to an overall acceleration of the THAAD decision, as depicted in Figure 5.

To understand the issues associated with THAAD in more depth, it is necessary to examine how the independent variables worked from the decision until the actual equipment was brought in and placed in the deployment area. The selection of a deployment area for THAAD in South Korea and the timing of deployment further increased the controversy even after the THAAD decision was made. THAAD's emergence as a controversial political issue, coupled with the issue of the president's corruption and impeachment, led political parties to fuel the controversy in order to benefit from it. Chapter IV examines which independent variables influenced the timing of THAAD deployment after the decision was made to deploy the system.

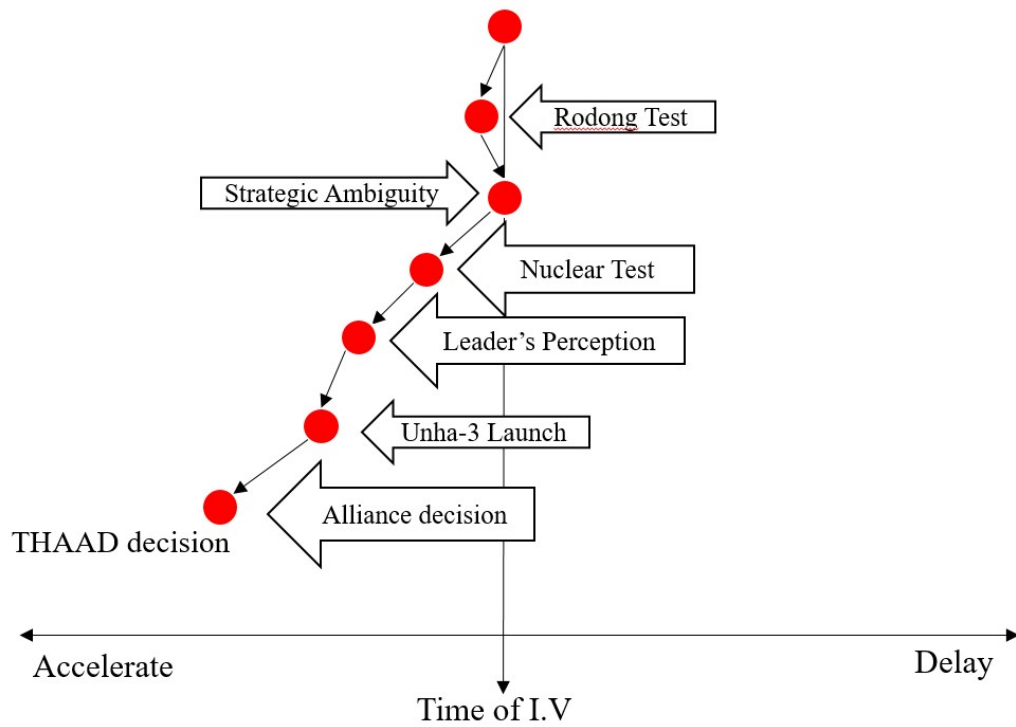


Figure 5. South Korea and THAAD – from initiation to decision.



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#### IV. SOUTH KOREA AND THAAD: FROM DECISION TO DEPLOYMENT

According to South Korea's *2016 Defense White Paper*, the THAAD system deployed in Korea is a THAAD battery, consisting of a turret control station, one fire control radar, six launchers, and 48 interceptor missiles.<sup>202</sup> As for the timing of the deployment, the *2016 Defense White Paper* stipulates that it should occur within 2017, and according to the announcement of the ROK-U.S. alliance, they planned to deploy by the end of 2017.<sup>203</sup>

Based on these two sources, this chapter sets the point at which the THAAD deployment should have been complete at the end of 2017. This chapter analyzes the development that led to the THAAD deployment being accelerated or delayed in the second phase, from the decision to adopt THAAD to the appearance of President Moon's administration on May 9, 2017. The chapter examines the roles of the five independent variables: 1) the changes in pressure of the US, 2) the changes in pressure by China driving external structural changes in South Korea, 3) the increased nuclear threat from North Korea, 4) the influence of conservative South Korean policy-makers, and 5) the South Korean public's political participation. The chapter examines which factor most influenced the dependent variable in this phase of the THAAD issue, and reveals how the five factors interacted with each other during the second phase. Finally, the chapter analyzes the relationship and overall significance of each variable. The investigation finds that the public factor contributed to the delay early on, but North Korea's nuclear tests and U.S. pressures overrode it later on.

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<sup>202</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, *2016 Defense White Paper* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2016), 64.

<sup>203</sup> James Griffiths, "South Korea Reveals Location of THAAD Missile Defense System," *CNN*, July 13, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/07/13/asia/south-korea-thaad-north-korea-china/index.html>.

## **A. FROM THE DECISION TO START ITS DEPLOYMENT**

### **1. Announcement of Seongju as the Deployment Site**

The announcement of Seongju as the THAAD deployment site caused anger among the residents of the province, and the South Korean government responded to this anger in a confusing manner.

On July 12, 2016, the South Korean Ministry of Defense announced that it had established Seongju as the site for the THAAD system.<sup>204</sup> The announcement came only a week after the THAAD deployment was decided. In announcing the deployment site, the South Korean government was concerned about a backlash from local residents rather than from the governments of China and North Korea, and the ministry's statement demonstrates the claim. South Korean Deputy Minister for Defense Policy, Ryu Je-Seung, announced that the THAAD site had been reviewed and considered the following factors: 1) maximizing the military's effectiveness and 2) ensuring the safety of local citizens. Also, at the end of the announcement, he begged the locals to understand the country's decision, considering the opposition of local people.<sup>205</sup>

Meanwhile, most members of the ruling party did not oppose the THAAD deployment after the government's announcement, but there were conflicting opinions and opposition parties opposed it for political gain. Twenty-one ruling parliamentarians from the region and surrounding areas of THAAD insisted that economic incentives should be provided to residents at the site of the THAAD, but the ruling party's Yoo Seung-Min, who had Daegu as a regional district, did not agree with the local population's expectations. He argued that residents have to tolerate its deployment as a measure to ensure national security.

On the other hand, several members of the opposition Democratic Party had a strong objection to the THAAD deployment, and lawmaker Moon Jae-In argued that the

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<sup>204</sup> Griffiths.

<sup>205</sup> Griffiths.

THAAD decision was more than a gain in terms of national interest.<sup>206</sup> Other opposition parties, such as the People's Party and the Justice Party, called for the withdrawal of the government's THAAD decision, and the next presidential candidate, Ahn Cheol-Soo, proposed a referendum. He also called on the government to consult the National Assembly for future THAAD decisions.

This disagreement between the ruling and opposition parties in the presidential system in Korea is one of the main features of the decision-making process, and the THAAD issue was a strategy to attract the public's attention as it concentrated on the presidential election.<sup>207</sup> In this winner-take-all system, politics easily becomes a zero-sum game, making tolerance and compromise difficult. Because of this feature, political parties in South Korea used all the social and political issues available as tools for fighting to take power and focused on the fighting itself.<sup>208</sup>

South Koreans generally wanted THAAD, except in Seongju. Residents of Seongju County and local government officials there began to fight back. As soon as the THAAD site was announced, more than 5,000 citizens gathered for demonstrations, which continued through the evening with candlelight demonstrations.<sup>209</sup>

By contrast, citizens outside the Seongju region supported the THAAD deployment, contrary to the wishes of the residents of the affected region. According to Gallup Korea, 50% of the respondents agreed with the THAAD deployment, while 38% agreed with the opposition.<sup>210</sup> In addition, 46% of people expressed their opinion that

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<sup>206</sup> Seung woo Lee, "yu-sung-min sa-tu, TKey pay-chi-tway-to kam-tang-hay-ya [Yoo Seung-min THAAD, Even if Placed in Daegu]," *Yonhap News*, July 12, 2016.  
<https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160712069451001>.

<sup>207</sup> Bruce Harrison, "Time for a Constitutional Change in South Korea?" *The Diplomat*, December 24, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/12/time-for-a-constitutional-change-in-south-korea/>.

<sup>208</sup> Harrison.

<sup>209</sup> Griffiths.

<sup>210</sup> Gallup Korea, *Gallup Korea Daily Opinion* 219, July 15, 2016,  
<https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=760>.

THAAD would be accepted even if it were located near their area.<sup>211</sup> Although it was judged that the reliability of the answer was not accurate because it was an opinion after the THAAD deployment area was already confirmed as Seongju, it was clear that public opinion still supported the THAAD decision.

Encouraged by this public opinion, President Park pressured the residents of Seongju County. President Park Geun-Hye convened the NSC on July 13 and told the people to stop unnecessary debate over the THAAD placement decision process, hazards, and efficacy, and to follow the decision of the state.<sup>212</sup> She gave the following reasons as a basis for her claim: 1) THAAD deployment was a matter of national security and public safety, making it impossible to disclose the decision-making process, and 2) THAAD needed to be deployed in a hurry due to North Korea's threat.<sup>213</sup>

Residents in Seongju did not agree with the government's explanations. One day later, on July 14, South Korea's prime minister visited Seongju to persuade Seongju residents, but he was trapped in a bus for six hours because of the revolts by angry residents. Only after the police had been dispatched could he escape.<sup>214</sup>

The government's response at the time of the announcement of Seongju as a THAAD placement site clearly showed that the Korean government was hesitant because of the opposition of the residents. The defense minister said he had no plans to announce the THAAD site until November 11. Yet, the South Korean government said it would announce the site on July 12. Before the announcement, the MND appeared confused by canceling and reversing the announcement because residents in Seongju did not participate in the announcement presentation.

There had even been suspicions that the defense minister did not know about the site presentation plan. These confusing actions of the Korean government indicated that

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<sup>211</sup> Gallup Korea.

<sup>212</sup> Griffiths.

<sup>213</sup> Griffiths.

<sup>214</sup> Jack Kim, "South Korean Protesting over U.S. Missile Defense Plan Block PM's Bus," *Reuters*, July 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-thaad-idUSKCN0ZV0ZG>.

the government was quite concerned about the people's opposition. The fact that the government pushed ahead with the announcement of the THAAD deployment, however, showed its readiness to confront that public opposition, perhaps to preempt it from growing stronger. Also, President Park's comments about the THAAD at the NSC following the announcement are evidence that public factors influenced the Korean government.

Table 10. Announcement of Seongju as the THAAD deployment site.

<b>I.V.</b>	<b>Assessment</b>		
	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea's threat			
United States			
China			
Policy-Maker			Public
Participation of the public	Low	Delay	

## 2. Increasing Demonstrations by the Public

China and the public factor hampered Korea's continued push for THAAD, but the South Korean government firmly pursued its policy. At the same time, persistent protests by the residents caused the South Korean government to consider other candidate sites.

During this time, China continued to press South Korea concerning THAAD. On July 16, at the World Peace Forum in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Minister Zhang Ye Xiu said that THAAD, placed on the Korean Peninsula, went beyond the real need for defense

on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>215</sup> He also stressed that THAAD would undermine China's strategic interests and East Asia's strategic balance and spark an arms race in East Asia.<sup>216</sup>

Meanwhile, the United States showed strong support for Korea's THAAD deployment and helped the South Korean government respond. On July 16, the United States decided to allow South Korea's MND access to the THAAD battery, deployed at Guam's Anderson Air Force Base, to help resolve the safety issues in Korea.<sup>217</sup> The U.S. provision of access to the THAAD base was likely to help dispel the controversy at a time when it was claimed that electromagnetic waves from the THAAD radar were damaging to residents. South Korea's MND measured electromagnetic waves from radar at the Guam base, at 1.6 kilometers away from the radar measuring 0.0007 watts per square meter, much lower than the safety allowance of 10 watts.<sup>218</sup>

Nevertheless, this measurement did not alleviate the controversy in Korean society. Several experts pointed out that the THAAD radar at Guam was different from the one planned for Seongju area due to different environmental conditions, making it hard to believe that the measured value would be the same at Seongju. It was not objective, they said, because it was an experiment conducted by the MND without impartial outside experts.<sup>219</sup> In addition, the Korean government and the U.S. military were not informative about under what conditions the test was conducted. In practice, radar results vary depending on the power setting and power level during the test, and the values could vary significantly depending on whether the measurements were made at the main beam or outside.

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<sup>215</sup> Zongxi Mu, “坚持合作共赢 促进共同发展-第五届世界和平论坛综述, [Persist in Cooperation and Win-Win and Promote Common Development - Summary of the Fifth World Peace Forum],” 人民日报, July 18, 2016, <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2016/0718/c1002-28562337.html>.

<sup>216</sup> Mu.

<sup>217</sup> SBS, “*mi-kwuk kwam sa-tu-ki-ci, han-kwuk-kwun, han-kwuk-en-lon-ey kong-kay*” [Open to the Korean Military and Media in THAAD, Guam, USA],” video, 1:51 (July 19, 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKsWIoo20ww>.

<sup>218</sup> SBS.

<sup>219</sup> SBS.

As a result, it was possible to imagine that intentional steps were taken to derive the lowest possible value. The negative Chinese reaction and U.S. support did not affect South Korea's official response as a result. Due to China's continued opposition, however, South Korea's National Assembly Speaker Chung Se-Kyun pointed to the deployment as an economic factor and said in his speech, "The economic outlook is not good because trade friction with China is expected."<sup>220</sup>

During this time, North Korea's provocations focused the attention of the South Korean government but did not affect the THAAD deployment time. North Korea successfully launched three ballistic missiles in Hwangju in the early morning of July 18, six days after the THAAD deployment was announced.<sup>221</sup> Two shots were analyzed as SRBMs and one as an MRBM.

Consequently, South Korean media analyzed North Korea's intentions as follows: 1) North Korea showed off its ability to launch simultaneous and surprise attacks, and 2) these attacks aggravated the domestic political conflict in South Korea over THAAD deployment.<sup>222</sup> The South Korean government strengthened its military readiness posture to North Korea's provocations and argued that if THAAD were deployed, South Korea would be able to build a multi-layer interceptor system, along with its existing Patriot missiles, that would respond to North Korea's provocations.<sup>223</sup> The government's response fueled the hard-liners' claim that the THAAD deployment should be expedited, but Seoul did not accelerate the official ROK THAAD deployment.

On July 20, 2016, residents in the area where the THAAD was assigned began to protest more strongly but failed to undermine the will of the Korean government. More

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<sup>220</sup> SBS.

<sup>221</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>222</sup> Jeong-jin Lee, "*tan-ke-li than-to-mi-sa-il 3pal pal-sa-ss-han-kwuk-uy sa-tu-pay-chi kyel-ceng-ey 'mwu-lyek-si-wi* [3 Shots of Short-Range Ballistic Missiles...Armed Demonstrations in South Korea's THAAD Decision]," *Yonhap News*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160719019553014>.

<sup>223</sup> Lee.



than 2,000 residents of Seongju held an anti-THAAD rally in Seoul.<sup>224</sup> This was the first time that residents who had consistently held candlelight gatherings in Seongju after the THAAD decision demonstrated in Seoul. Residents of Seongju distinguished themselves from outsiders by wearing blue marks, which prevented others with malicious intentions from participating in the meetings. The protest was held nonviolently. Demonstrators insisted on the government's withdrawal of the THAAD decision, and did so for the following reasons: 1) Before the THAAD decision, there was no government fieldwork, and the decision was too hasty. 2) The government did not provide a convincing explanation regarding the electromagnetic wave problem.<sup>225</sup> On the July 21, President Park Geun-Hye insisted that the NSC must thoroughly screen the forces of participation in the rally to discern any malicious intentions and emphasized the possibility of left-wing participation in the rally.<sup>226</sup> President Park's remarks publicly characterized the gatherings of Seongju residents as a left-wing rally. Through her statements, it could be seen as President Park's intention to treat the protests as a matter of national security to prevent the THAAD issue from becoming a political issue.

During this time, the U.S. support continued to quell domestic political debate in Korea. In an interview with the media, the U.S. Ambassador Mark Lippert refuted the claim that the controversial increase in defense contributions was caused by THAAD, and that the THAAD deployment meant that South Korea would be incorporated into the U.S. MD system.<sup>227</sup> He also stressed that the ROK-U.S. alliance decision to deploy THAAD had not changed the existing U.S. position to resolve the North Korean issue peacefully and that President Obama would continue to maintain a peaceful approach toward the North's denuclearization.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Yeji Jeon, "*seng-cwu-kwun-min sang-kyeng, pha-lan-li-pon tal-ko sa-tu-pay-chi pan-tay si-wi* [Protest against THAAD Deployment with Blue Ribbon]," *MBC*, July 21, 2016, [http://imnews.imbc.com/replay/2016/nwdesk/article/4034905\\_19842.html](http://imnews.imbc.com/replay/2016/nwdesk/article/4034905_19842.html).

<sup>225</sup> Jeon.

<sup>226</sup> Jeon.

<sup>227</sup> "Ambassador Ripper "No Raising Defense Contribution due to THAAD Deployment,"" *YTN*, July 22, 2016, video, 1:47, [https://www.ytn.co.kr/\\_ln/0101\\_201607222100158454](https://www.ytn.co.kr/_ln/0101_201607222100158454).

<sup>228</sup> "Ambassador Ripper "No Raising Defense Contribution due to THAAD Deployment.""

Despite support from the U.S. and North Korea's provocations in helping to deploy THAAD, President Park's approval rating declined after the THAAD deployment decision due to the president's transparency issues. According to data released by Gallup Korea on July 22, 52% of the respondents to a survey question about President Park Geun-Hye's performance in the THAAD deployment region were negative, and 38% were positive.<sup>229</sup> These results seemed to correlate with continued regional backlash after the THAAD decision. A similar evaluation was made nationwide, with 55% negatively assessing President Park's performance and 32% positively.<sup>230</sup> The public who negatively evaluated Park Geun-Hye's ability to perform her job had the highest priority of 'transparency' at 19%, followed by 'economy policy' at 14%.<sup>231</sup> "Transparency" in the THAAD decision-making process and in the process of selecting a deployment site was also considered to be a problem in the public's eyes.

On July 23, 2016, the day after the survey announcing that President Park Geun-Hye's support rate was steadily falling, the Korean government rejected the THAAD site proposed by the residents of Seongju. The reason was as follows: 1) accepting a third site would cause further controversy, and 2) the THAAD site, which had already been announced, had been decided by the ROK-U.S. Joint Working Group after sufficient discussion. Whether the Korean government's response was driven by public opinion is difficult to judge considering the state of public opinion at the time.

On July 24, 2016, China's and South Korea's foreign ministers held bilateral talks in Laos, where the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) was held. In the meeting, which South Korea proposed, Wang Yi directly criticized South Korea's recent THAAD decision to harm mutual trust in the presence of South Korean Minister Yoon Byung-Se. He also called for a response from the South Korean minister on what action Korea

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<sup>229</sup> Gallup Korea, *Gallup Korea Daily Opinion* 220, July 22, 2016, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=762>.

<sup>230</sup> Gallup Korea.

<sup>231</sup> Gallup Korea.

would take to protect the bilateral relations it had developed.<sup>232</sup> His remarks led to the expectation that if Yoon's response did not meet China's expectations, China would retaliate. In addition, China's strong reaction further aggravated Korea's concerns. This was because, as explained in Chapter II, given its growing economic dependence on China, South Korea lacked the leverage to deal with China's pressure through various forms of action.

On the other hand, China embraced North Korea in contrast to how it had behaved toward South Korea. China attended the ARF in the same plane as North Korea and used the same accommodation.<sup>233</sup> The change in relationship between North Korea and China, which had been distant for a long time, meant much to South Korea. This was because it also meant that China's cooperation with the sanctions against North Korea that the South Korean government wanted had become far-fetched.

China's strong attitude, though, did not cause a change in South Korea's position. This can be seen from the remarks by Minister Yoon. He mentioned in an ARF interview that he had a comprehensive exchange of opinions on the North Korean nuclear issue and THAAD issues with China, but he argued that a responsible government should, of course, deploy THAAD as a defense to protect national security and people's lives.<sup>234</sup> This represented Seoul's position of approaching security and economic issues separately. In other words, the option to delay or cancel the deployment of THAAD could not be considered and there was no change in South Korea's stance on THAAD.

In August 2016, China adhered to its traditional opposition to THAAD and began to put pressure on South Korea. China indirectly retaliated to THAAD under pressure from the public cultural sector. The National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) of China had issued the following guidelines for each broadcaster in China. First, the NRTA placed a ban on Korean activities by South Korean pop groups. Second, no

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<sup>232</sup> Jehoon Lee, "Yoon Byung-se-Wang Yi ruptures Korea-China Relations over Decision on USFK Deployment," *The Hankyoreh*, July 25, 2016, <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/diplomacy/753713.html>.

<sup>233</sup> Lee.

<sup>234</sup> Lee.

performances by South Korean singers were permitted. Further, Korean cultural projects were banned, and cultural cooperation with South Korea was restricted.<sup>235</sup> Such intense pressure from the cultural world on the Chinese side was a significant shock to the Korean cultural industry, and the spread of these currents was an issue for the South Korean government. According to Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA), China's investment in South Korea, which was about \$500 million in 2014, increased significantly to \$ 1.7 billion in the first half of 2016, and more than 70% of the investment was focused on the cultural industry and the service industry, not on the existing manufacturing industry.<sup>236</sup>

During this time, South Korea's two opposition political parties, the People's Party and the Justice Party, visited Seongju on August 1 and devoted themselves to taking advantage of the situation by turning social issues into domestic political issues. Residents of the Seongju supported the opposition's visit, and the opposition parties promised the residents that they would raise a problem at the National Assembly, which checks the government's decision. On the same day, the ruling Saenuri Party also visited Seongju, but residents' reaction was very hostile, as expected, in contrast to the opposition's visit.

One day later, on August 2, President Park once again informed the people and the members of the State Council that the decision concerning the deployment of THAAD was unlikely to change because it related to a matter of national security and people's safety.<sup>237</sup> In line with this argument, she stressed to the members of the State Council who attended the State Council that they should make efforts to explain to the

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<sup>235</sup> Young woong Park, "*sa-tu hwu-phok-phwung l-han-lyu 'cek-sin-ho'* [Post-THAAD "Red Signal" of the Korean Wave in China]," *The Chosun Ilbo*, August 1, 2016, [http://m.sportschosun.com/news.htm?id=201608020100009820000434&ServiceDate=20160801&f\\_url=#\\_adtep#\\_enliple](http://m.sportschosun.com/news.htm?id=201608020100009820000434&ServiceDate=20160801&f_url=#_adtep#_enliple).

<sup>236</sup> "Statistics on Foreign Trade of South Korea," KOTRA, accessed November 4, 2019, <http://stat.kita.net/stat/istat/cts/CtsWholeList.screen>.

<sup>237</sup> Gun Taek Kang, "*an-po-so-myeng-lon-u-lo sa-tu-ho-so* [THAAD Appeal by Security Theory]," *Yonhap News*, August 2, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160802093951001>.

public the legitimacy and safety of the deployment and seek their understanding.<sup>238</sup> These remarks represented the official response of Seoul and again formalized that there would be no reversal of the THAAD decision or delayed deployment due to domestic political conflicts.

Changes in the pattern of missile launches by North Korea consistently pressured the South Korean government but did not alter its decision. On August 3, 2016, North Korea fired two Rodong missiles, and one of the two missiles flew 1,000 kilometers to fall into Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).<sup>239</sup> It was the first time a North Korean missile had flown as far as Japan's EEZ and the first time North Korea fired a Rodong missile at a maximum range of 1,300 kilometers. Experts have shown that the North Korean Rodong missile provocations had all been firing at a high angle to reduce the range. This time, however, they were aimed at a lower angle in the direction of U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ) bases and military facilities in Japan, from where U.S. reinforcements would enter the Korean Peninsula. It was analyzed that the firing was maintained at 45–55 degrees.<sup>240</sup> South Korea expressed concern through an immediate statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but there was no mention of THAAD.

On August 5, 2016, the Defense Ministry's proposal to jointly investigate other candidate sites in place of Seongju with the THAAD withdrawal fighting committee contributed in part to the delay in the deployment of THAAD. This was because the basic policy of the government in Seoul had been insisting on the Seongju deployment since the decision to deploy THAAD, and the Ministry of Defense's recommendation of investigating other candidates with the Seongju non-governmental organizations was difficult because the South Korean government could not say that there was no possibility

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<sup>238</sup> Kang.

<sup>239</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>240</sup> Missile Defense Project.

of deploying THAAD to another candidate area.<sup>241</sup> This meant that the deployment of THAAD could be delayed because another deployment area should be examined for THAAD and an environmental assessment would be required.

On the same day, President Park heightened the controversy with comments similar to those of the Ministry of Defense's opinion. At a meeting with lawmakers in Daegu and Gyeongbuk, President Park said the government would carefully investigate any proposals recommended by lawmakers to consider relocating THAAD to other areas.<sup>242</sup> President Park also said that the goal of deploying THAAD by the end of 2017 would remain unchanged unless Seongju recommended another region.<sup>243</sup> It was hard to say that THAAD's deployment would not be delayed if such remarks recommended other regions. These comments from President Park and the Ministry of Defense's alternative options for the THAAD deployment area contributed to the spread of candlelight vigils among citizens. Gimcheon residents near Seongju, who heard rumors that the THAAD site could relocate there, also held a candlelight rally with the Seongju residents on August 20 to oppose THAAD.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Sun ki Park, "*seng-cwu-sa-tu-thwu-cayng-wi, kwuk-pang-pwu 'cey-3-hwu-po-ci hap-tong-co-sa cey-an' ke-pwu*" [Seongju THAAD Withdrawal Struggle Committee Rejected 3rd Candidate Joint Investigation Proposal by Ministry of Defense], *Yonhap News*, August 5, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160805130751053>.

<sup>242</sup> Nok yong Jeong, "*lyeph 'sa-tu pay-chi ci-yek cay-kem-tho-nun a-ni-ta' pak-tay-thong-lyeng pal-en non-lan cin-hwa*" [The Blue House "It's not THAAD Deployment Area Review" President Park's Comments' Controversial Evolution], *The Chosun Ilbo*, August 6, 2016, [http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2016/08/06/2016080600250.html](http://news.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2016/08/06/2016080600250.html).

<sup>243</sup> Jeong.

<sup>244</sup> Jeong.

Table 11. Increasing number of demonstrations by the public.

<b>I.V.</b> \ <b>Assessment</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea's threat			
United States			
China			
Policy-Maker			Public
Participation of the public	Low	Delay	

### 3. Additional Nuclear Test by North Korea

The conflict between China and the United States did not affect Korea's response to THAAD. Additional nuclear tests by North Korea, however, helped accelerate the deployment of THAAD. The South Korean government's comments related to the deployment of THAAD following North Korea's nuclear test demonstrated this claim.

During this time, China distanced itself from South Korea's ruling Saenuri Party, adding fuel to the nation's domestic political conflict by exchanging views related to the THAAD with the opposition Democratic Party as well. Representatives of the ruling Saenuri Party attempted to visit China shortly after the announcement of THAAD for a meeting with the head of the Chinese Communist Party's international liaison department in charge of foreign policy, but failed due to Beijing's refusal.<sup>245</sup> On the other hand, representatives of the opposition party and the Democratic Party visited China on August 6 and received a warm welcome from China, and exchanged opinions on THAAD with Li Hong Lin, general manager of the China Revolutionary Promotion Association.<sup>246</sup> This Chinese response was the result of the combination of China's strategic interest in

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<sup>245</sup> Jeong hyun Lee, "*sa-tu-pan-tay' te-min-cwu cho-sen 6myeng pang-cwung-ss-pang-han t-min-cwu uy-kyen cheng-chwi*" [Six Members of the Main Opposition Minjoo Party of Korea to Visit China], *Yonhap News*, August 4, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160804040551001>.

<sup>246</sup> Lee.

THAAD withdrawal and the opposition parties' strategic interest in China's support in preparation for the next presidential election, as the opposition parties in South Korea were also not in favor of the THAAD deployment.

Meanwhile, the United States explained the controversial issue of major U.S. personnel visiting South Korea to calm the controversy over the deployment of THAAD in Korea. Members of the American Diplomatic Association, including Senator Michael Siefer, a senior adviser to the Foreign Affairs Committee, visited South Korea to meet with lawmakers. Siefer, who was classified as a diplomatic chief of the Democratic presidential candidate, met with opposition lawmakers one after another to exchange views.<sup>247</sup> The main agenda was the THAAD deployment issue, the North Korean nuclear issue, and other issues comprehensively. He argued that the United States did not ask about the THAAD deployment problem unilaterally, but because of the mutual need of the United States and ROK.<sup>248</sup>

Also, Navy Lieutenant General James Shiling of the U.S. Defense Department's Missile Defense Agency (MDA), who oversees the U.S. missile defense strategy, visited South Korea and told reporters about the interceptor's ability to relate to THAAD. He told reporters that the THAAD successfully intercepted the target in all 13 intercept tests, which was also reported to the U.S. Congress.<sup>249</sup> His remarks strongly contradicted the argument that THAAD's interceptors were limited. He also actively refuted the claims and concerns of those who opposed THAAD, saying that THAAD would be operated solely as the property of the U.S.-ROK alliance and would not be part of the global missile defense system operated by the U.S. military.<sup>250</sup> He further addressed China's continued concern that THAAD, if deployed on the Korean Peninsula, could be used to

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<sup>247</sup> Lee.

<sup>248</sup> Lee.

<sup>249</sup> Jeong-jin Lee, "*t-mi-sa-il-pang-e-cheng-cang, sa-tu an-cen-seng sel-myeng wi-hay pang-han* [U.S. Missile Defense Commission Visits Korea to Explain Safety of THAAD]," *Yonhap News*, August 11, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20160811081200014>.

<sup>250</sup> Lee.



detect Chinese missile bases, by stating that it could be operated only in terminal mode, and so cover only territory in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>251</sup>

On August 9, 2016, China's actions at the UN brought the THAAD issue to the attention of the world, not only East Asia. China discussed South Korea's THAAD issue at the UN Security Council and opposed the Security Council statement on North Korea's ballistic missile launch.<sup>252</sup> China demanded that the UN Security Council add opposition to THAAD in the process of adopting a condemnation statement, and the United States eventually gave up adopting the statement because it was unacceptable.<sup>253</sup> On the international stage, China's opposition to THAAD was an opportunity to actively publicize the fact that the deployment of THAAD on the Korean Peninsula would raise tensions in Northeast Asia, and it assumed that such a position would continue in the future.

On September 8, 2016, North Korea conducted a fifth nuclear test with the alleged hydrogen bombs.<sup>254</sup> A 5.3 magnitude tremor was detected near the North's nuclear test site, and the United States and China immediately warned of the North's nuclear test. The United States warned that it would have serious consequences. Beijing opposed North Korea's experiment and urged them to avoid further measures that would make the situation worse.<sup>255</sup> North Korea stated that its fifth nuclear test involved a "nuclear warhead that has been standardized to be able to be mounted on strategic ballistic rockets."<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Lee.

<sup>252</sup> Amanda Macias, "For the Second Time in a Row, the UN Hit a Dead End on What to Do about North Korea's Missile Launches," *Business Insider*, August 10, 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.com/afp-un-fails-to-condemn-n-korea-after-china-draws-link-to-thaad-2016-8>.

<sup>253</sup> Macias.

<sup>254</sup> Steve Evans, "North Korea Claims Success in Fifth Nuclear Test," *BBC*, September 9, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37314927>.

<sup>255</sup> Evans.

<sup>256</sup> Evans.

There were differences between countries about the extent of the test's explosive power. South Korea claimed it was roughly 10 kilotons, while other experts said it would be more than 20 kilotons, given the initial symptoms.<sup>257</sup> This is more explosive than the 15-kiloton nuclear warhead that the United States dropped in Hiroshima in 1945. North Korea claimed to have conducted its fifth nuclear test with a hydrogen bomb using nuclear fusion and that it had the capacity and willingness to produce a variety of small, light, and diverse warheads that could be mounted on ballistic rockets.<sup>258</sup> North Korea's claim on miniaturized nuclear warheads, however, had not been verified by any source except North Korea.

South Korean President Park suspended her overseas visits due to the North's nuclear test and returned to the Blue House to respond to the North's further actions while warning Kim Jong-Un that his government's test was an act of self-destruction.<sup>259</sup> She also said she would accept additional provocations as a severe challenge to the ROK-U.S. alliance.<sup>260</sup>

North Korea's continued nuclear test posed a stumbling block to China, which continued to stand against THAAD. On the other hand, South Korea and the United States took this opportunity to speed up the deployment of THAAD. The United States expressed its willingness to deploy THAAD as soon as possible through formal remarks at the House of Representatives and ministerial meetings with the ROK. In addition, claims by the USFK Commander and the South Korean government also supported the acceleration of the deployment.

Speaking to the House Foreign Affairs Committee on September 27, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel R. Russell said the deployment would also be accelerated, given the rapid pace of North Korea's missile

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<sup>257</sup> Evans.

<sup>258</sup> Evans.

<sup>259</sup> Evans.

<sup>260</sup> Evans.

development.<sup>261</sup> In addition, on October 19, Secretary of State John Kerry said that he would make efforts to deploy THAAD to South Korea as soon as possible to comply with its security commitment to its ally, South Korea, at the “2 + 2” ministerial meeting in Washington, D.C.<sup>262</sup> The South Korean government supported the acceleration of the U.S. deployment of THAAD through remarks by the defense and foreign ministers.<sup>263</sup> Although Seoul did not disclose the deployment schedule due to military issues, it claimed that the remarks at the ministerial talks represented Seoul’s official position to accelerate the deployment of THAAD.

Table 12. Additional nuclear test by North Korea.

<b>Assessment</b> <b>I.V.</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea’s threat	High	Accelerate	
United States			North Korea
China			North Korea
Policy-Maker			North Korea
Participation of the public			

#### 4. Korea’s Political Crisis and the New U.S. President

The election of the Republican president of the United States and the political crisis in South Korea did not affect THAAD deployment at the beginning. But continued

<sup>261</sup> Daniel R. Russell, “The U.S.-Republic of Korea-Japan Trilateral Relationship: Promoting Mutual Interest in Asia,” (Hearing, Washington, DC: U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, September 27, 2016), <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/2016/9/us-republic-korea-japan-trilateral-relationship-promoting-mutual-interests-asia>.

<sup>262</sup> Alex Johnson, “Kerry Promises to Deploy Missile System to South Korea ‘as Soon as Possible,’” *NBC News*, October 19, 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/kerry-promises-deploy-missile-system-south-korea-soon-possible-n669161>.

<sup>263</sup> Johnson.

pressure from the United States helped accelerate South Korea's decision on the deployment.

In November and December 2016, it was very likely that THAAD could be affected by the issue of leader replacement in both South Korea and the United States. In November, the Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump, became president through the U.S. presidential election, which was likely to influence THAAD deployment. While he was a candidate he argued for the possibility of withdrawing U.S. troops from Korea, and discussed the issue of defense-sharing for U.S. allies.<sup>264</sup>

In December 2016, South Korea's domestic political situation was very confusing due to President Park's impeachment, but South Korea's position on THAAD had not changed. This was supported in remarks by Prime Minister Hwang Gyo-An's, who legally took the place of the president. President Park's impeachment vote at the National Assembly on December 9 deprived President Park of her legal role and authority as the president.<sup>265</sup> The relationship between Park Geun-Hye and Choi Soon-Sil, raised in the Korean media, turned out to be true; Choi Soon-Sil intervened in the Park Geun-Hye administration illegally and abused her power and forced the *chaebol* to bribe her private firm.<sup>266</sup> The scandal eventually led to prosecution investigations and impeachment, which passed the National Assembly on December 9. The motion passed with 234 votes, more than two-thirds, although the ruling Saenuri Party took the 128 seats among the 300 members.<sup>267</sup> The ruling party had enough seats to oppose impeachment, but there was a conflict of opinion within the party and many voted in favor of the growing number of people attending the candlelight vigils.

Park Geun-Hye's impeachment meant that policy on THAAD could change. Because of her impeachment, Park could no longer exercise the power of the president,

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<sup>264</sup> "Presidential Election Results: Donald J. Trump Wins," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/president>.

<sup>265</sup> Sang-Hun Choe, "South Korea Removes President Park Geun-hye," *The New York Times*, March 9, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/world/asia/park-geun-hye-impeached-south-korea.html>.

<sup>266</sup> Choe.

<sup>267</sup> Choe.

and the prime minister would act with the president's legal authority. Many members of the media focused on the fact that the policy could be changed by the prime minister's political tendency or preference.<sup>268</sup>

During this time, the prime minister, Hwang Gyo-An, became acting president, and through media interviews he once again communicated the official opinion of the ROK government regarding THAAD deployment. He said in an interview that he expected a clash with opposition parties regarding the deployment of THAAD, but South Korea's THAAD policy stance remained unchanged and had no intention of overturning it.<sup>269</sup> The commander of the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command also supported South Korea's position regarding THAAD. He said he was concerned about the political situation in South Korea but insisted that THAAD should be deployed normally.<sup>270</sup>

On December 12, 2016, in a defense committee meeting held at the National Assembly, Han Min-Gu strongly rejected the opposition legislator's opinion to review THAAD, citing China's backlash.<sup>271</sup> The committee also said that it would be difficult to finalize the deployment by the first half of 2017, but some claimed that the government would deploy THAAD in a hurry. If China's economic sanctions continued, with Park Geun-Hye's impeachment likely to push ahead the presidential election, South Korea's politics and the economy would be difficult to get out of the unstable situation. Nevertheless, Seoul's position on THAAD remained unchanged.

At the same time, China also pressured the ROK by mentioning the THAAD issue, noting the political turmoil in South Korea and the possible changes in policy regarding U.S. forces in South Korea due to the U.S. presidential election. For example, an unexpected visit by a Chinese Foreign Ministry official was evaluated as a political

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<sup>268</sup> Han seung Lee, "*sa-tu-ps-han-il wi-an-pwu hyep-ceng pyen-kyeng eps-ta* [There Is No Change of THAAD, Korea-Japan Comfort Women Agreement]," *Yonhap News*, December 18, 2016, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20161217045200001>.

<sup>269</sup> Lee.

<sup>270</sup> Lee.

<sup>271</sup> Lee.

strategy to spread opposition to THAAD in South Korea.<sup>272</sup> According to Korea Broadcasting System (KBS) News in South Korea, on December 30, Hai Chen, the Chinese government official responsible for the THAAD deployment issue, met with political and economic figures in South Korea despite opposition from the ROK government.<sup>273</sup> He warned that the deployment of THAAD would make it difficult for South Korean companies to do business in China, and he made a diplomatic discourtesy by describing South Korea as a small country, saying, “The small country does not listen to the great nation.”<sup>274</sup> China’s diplomatic junta was a political strategy to reinforce the opposition to THAAD in politically unstable South Korea, because there was no formal discussion with officials of the ROK government; however, he had contact with opposition lawmakers, progressive think tanks, media representatives, and representatives of South Korean companies on the THAAD issue. Party approval ratings announced by Gallup Korea also make this assessment possible. Due to Park’s impeachment, in December the approval rating of 35% for the Democratic Party (one of the opposition parties) was the highest since October 2016, and significantly above the 13% rating for the Saenuri Party.<sup>275</sup>

In January 2017, South Korea’s defense minister reported to the acting president the ministry’s main objectives for 2017, arguing that South Korea’s position on the THAAD deployment should continue to be pursued.<sup>276</sup> Also, the Ministry of Defense recommended that the South Korean government continue its THAAD deployment based on the following security situation analysis: 1) increased uncertainty in defense policy due to the launch of a new U.S. administration; 2) increased instability due to China’s

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<sup>272</sup> “China’s Deputy Foreign Minister for THAAD to Seoul,” *KBS*, December 30, 2016, [http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news\\_view.htm?lang=k&Seq\\_Code=275232](http://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=k&Seq_Code=275232).

<sup>273</sup> “China’s Deputy Foreign Minister for THAAD to Seoul.”

<sup>274</sup> “China’s Deputy Foreign Minister for THAAD to Seoul.”

<sup>275</sup> “Gallup Korea Daily Opinion,” *Korea Gallop* 239, December 8, 2016, <https://panel.gallup.co.kr/Gate/Panel/F022.aspx?seq=795&Yy=&SearchGb=&SearchKey=&date=Wed Nov 6 22:58:42 PST 2019>.

<sup>276</sup> “2017 Government Briefing,” Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Republic of Korea, accessed November 12, 2019, <http://korea.kr/2017briefing/>.

coercive foreign policy; 3) the possibility of further provocation due to the advancement of North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities.<sup>277</sup> The acting president continued to support the deployment of THAAD in South Korea and the official position of the ROK government remained unchanged.<sup>278</sup>

By contrast, public opinion gradually moved to opposition to THAAD, as Seongju citizens wanted. The main reasons were the military gains and national interests related to THAAD, which were raised continuously throughout the THAAD controversy.<sup>279</sup> According to a Gallup Korea survey conducted in January, 51% of Koreans agreed with THAAD, and 40% disapproved. These figures were 5% lower in favor of THAAD than before Park Geun-Hye was impeached, and 9% higher in opposition to the deployment.<sup>280</sup> Changes in these figures showed that the number of people who favored THAAD had continued to grow in 2016, and reached 56% in August, but now moved towards opposing THAAD. The majority of those who were still in favor, 80%, were concerned about North Korea's threats; those on the other side were concerned about the effects of THAAD, 20%, and more about national interests, 17%, than military security.<sup>281</sup>

Entering March 2017, North Korea's provocations had been a catalyst for stimulating hard-liners in the new U.S. administration, supporting early deployment of THAAD. North Korea launched missile provocations on March 5 and March 21, and starting February 17 criticized the ROK-U.S. alliance military training in February and March, as it had done every year. North Korea simultaneously launched a range of missiles at various distances, a change in the launch pattern aimed at the THAAD base, which was scheduled to be deployed in South Korea. Experts said that the simultaneous

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<sup>277</sup> "2017 Government Briefing."

<sup>278</sup> "2017 Government Briefing."

<sup>279</sup> "Gallup Korea Daily Opinion," *Korea Gallup* 243, January 20, 2017, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=808>.

<sup>280</sup> "Gallup Korea Daily Opinion."

<sup>281</sup> "Gallup Korea Daily Opinion."

launch of the MRBMs was aimed at the ranges of Seongju, where THAAD would be deployed, and the U.S. Marine Corps Airbase in Japan, Iwakuni.<sup>282</sup> In addition, North Korea's continued missile provocations were propelled by Hwasung-12 (IRBM) launches on April 5 and 16, considering the U.S. Trump administration's plans to visit Asia.<sup>283</sup>

On April 4, 2017, the South Korean government decided to provide KRW 1.3 trillion in government-level funding to Seongju in order to compensate for the THAAD deployment, allocated in various ways: 1) construction of highways and trains, 2) subsidies to local specialty cultivation farms, and 3) Seongju landscape maintenance and cable grounding.<sup>284</sup> This government support was used as a means to mitigate the antipathy caused by THAAD. According to the local newspaper Gyeongbuk Ilbo, 83.6% answered in a questionnaire that Seongju citizens should be supported by the government if THAAD was deployed.<sup>285</sup> This reflected the desire of the citizens of Seongju-gun to gain economic benefits, considering that the deployment of THAAD was in fact in progress.

On April 16, 2017, the U.S. Vice President, Mike Pence, visited South Korea. This first visit to Asia after the Trump administration came to power had significant implications for China and North Korea, because the main objectives of the visit were the cost issues associated with the ROK-U.S. alliance, North Korea's ongoing nuclear threat, and THAAD.<sup>286</sup> His visit put diplomatic pressure on South Korea, and its acting president did not want the THAAD deployment to be reversed or delayed by the upcoming South Korean presidential election.

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<sup>282</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>283</sup> Missile Defense Project.

<sup>284</sup> Soon ki Park, "*ceng-pwu, sa-tu-pay-chi ci-wen-chayk pal-phyo* [South Korean Government Announces Support Plan for THAAD Deployment]," *Yonhap News*, April 4, 2017, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20170404092600053>.

<sup>285</sup> Park.

<sup>286</sup> Adam Withnall, "US and South Korea Agree 'Early' Deployment of THAAD Missile Defense System," *Independent*, April 17, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/us-north-korea-south-missile-test-nuclear-thaad-defence-system-a7686756.html>.



Eventually, after meetings between the acting president and Pence in South Korea, the ROK government decided to rush a little further.<sup>287</sup> Such U.S. moves and South Korea's decision also meant a changed U.S. policy toward East Asia. The visit to South Korea by U.S. Vice President Pence, known as a hard-liner, was politically influential enough to pressure Seoul to deploy THAAD, which the South Korean acting president accepted, and Seoul's official response was to deploy THAAD at an early date. Politically, Hwang's decision was understandable, even considering the ever-increasing number of opposition party support rates since the beginning of the year. The opposition party support rate increased steadily from January 2017 to reach 44% in March, while the popularity of the renamed ruling Liberal Korea Party was steadily falling to 12%.<sup>288</sup> It appeared it would be challenging to maintain the regime considering the support rates of the next presidential candidate by the people.<sup>289</sup>

On April 26, 2017, some equipment of THAAD, which came to the ROK at dawn Korean time, entered the THAAD site of Seongju.<sup>290</sup> The U.S. military brought two THAAD launchers and fire control radar to Seongju Golf Course within four hours after midnight on the day. The USFK undertook a site relocation procedure under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to deploy THAAD for over a month after the two THAAD launchers and some equipment were brought through Osan Base in March.<sup>291</sup> Considering the opposition from Seongju citizens, USFK deployed THAAD equipment by surprise at dawn instead of during the day.

South Korea's MND consistently stated that it was physically impossible for equipment to be deployed before the presidential election considering the ROK-U.S. consultations process on the deployment of THAAD. However, effectively ridiculing the

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<sup>287</sup> Withnall.

<sup>288</sup> "Gallop Korea Daily Opinion," *Korea Gallop* 248 (March 3, 2017), <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=817>.

<sup>289</sup> "Gallop Korea Daily Opinion."

<sup>290</sup> Gwi geun Kim, "USFK, THAAD Battery Test Soon," *Yonhap News*, July 26, 2017, <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20170426024751014?input=1195m>.

<sup>291</sup> Kim.

MND's excuse, the THAAD system had been brought in and deployed before the presidential election. Many experts charged that the deployment was quick to make the deployment of THAAD irreversible after the presidential election, in situations where a progressive president was likely to be elected.<sup>292</sup> The action of the ROK-U.S. alliance once again stimulated Seongju citizens; 200 villagers prevented THAAD equipment from entering the deployment area, but they were suppressed by more than 8,000 police officers. The number of opposing residents decreased compared to the 5,000 people who held the rally when they first opposed THAAD.<sup>293</sup>

Table 13. Korea's political crisis and the new U.S. President.

<b>Assessment</b> <b>I.V.</b>	<b>Influence on D.V.</b>	<b>Accelerate/Delay</b>	<b>Dependent</b>
North Korea's threat			
United States	High	Accelerate	
China			
Policy-Maker	High	Accelerate	United States
Participation of the public			

As expected, the progressive Moon Jae-In regime took the opportunity presented by the impeachment of the third conservative regime in South Korea to win the presidential election on May 10. The new regime did not make any progress in the deployment of THAAD due to questions about the decision-making process regarding THAAD during the preceding conservative regime. The result was a temporary suspension of further deployment under the new president's direction.

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<sup>292</sup> Kim.

<sup>293</sup> Kim; Harrison.

Despite the president's instructions, however, many people still supported THAAD. According to a poll immediately after the Moon Jae-In election, 53% of the South Korean public were in favor of THAAD, an increase of 2% compared to the beginning of the year, and 32% opposed it, an 8% decrease from the beginning of the year.<sup>294</sup> Most of the people in favor were concerned about national security and the safety of the people, while those who were opposed continued to mention the drawbacks of THAAD.<sup>295</sup>

## B. CONCLUSION OF THE SECOND PHASE

The conclusion of this chapter is summarized in Table 14. This chapter analyzed what factors affected the timing of the THAAD deployment in South Korea and looked at which factors affected timing the most. Official discussion by the ROK-U.S. alliance and the import of some parts of the THAAD system took place quickly due to the political crisis in South Korea. Nevertheless, it took a long time for all the planned powers to be deployed due to the intervention of the Moon Jae-In regime.

Table 14. Analysis of the second phase.

	External Factors			Domestic Factors	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Phase	North Korea	U.S.	China	Leader	Public
Announcement				←	Delay
Demonstration				←	Delay
Nuclear Test	Accelerate ←	→		→	
Political Crisis		Accelerate	→	Accelerate	
THAAD deployment					

Key: In the table, red: high, yellow: low, —→: Dependence

This chapter shows how, in contrast to the first phase, the primary independent variables were in conflict, with external factors acting to accelerate and domestic factors

<sup>294</sup> Gallup Korea, *Gallop Korea Daily Opinion* 263, June 16, 2017, <https://www.gallup.co.kr/gallupdb/reportContent.asp?seqNo=839>.

<sup>295</sup> Gallup Korea.

acting to delay the timing of the deployment. The factor that contributed most to the delayed deployment of THAAD is public opinion, and the factors that accelerated deployment time are North Korea's nuclear threat and changes in pressure from the United States and China, which pushed the ROK leadership to a decision.

In chronological order, immediately after the THAAD deployment was determined, the factor of public opinion, a domestic factor, influenced the delay of THAAD deployment by forming persistent opposition and anti-THAAD public opinion through media. Yet, due to security threats from North Korea's nuclear test and political pressure from the new administration of the United States, the timing of the deployment of THAAD eventually accelerated. Therefore, the most decisive factors among the independent variables were the external factors.

Looking more closely, first, it is clear that North Korea's nuclear test made a decisive contribution to advancing the THAAD deployment. This is because, as explained earlier, the South Korean government and the president responded very sensitively to North Korea's nuclear test, and deepened the ROK government's worries as many experts assessed the progress made on North Korea's nuclear capability.

North Korea's advanced nuclear threat also stimulated the U.S. intention to achieve North Korea's denuclearization, putting political pressure on South Korea. As can be seen in Russell's and Kerry's official remarks, North Korea's nuclear tests also influenced the will of the United States with substantial THAAD assets. North Korea's dangerous actions helped the ROK-U.S. alliance to accelerate the THAAD deployment.

Furthermore, continued pressure from the United States played a significant role in the rapid deployment of THAAD. Since the advent of the new administration, the United States continually pressured South Korea to deploy THAAD. As part of this effort, since the launch of a new administration in the United States, Vice President Pence visited South Korea before any other country and achieved THAAD deployment sooner after discussions with Seoul. Also, the ROK acting president's concern about the upcoming South Korean presidential election promoted this result because the president's impeachment from the same political party had already given much support to Moon Jae-in.

Lastly, public opinion in Seongju areas opposed to THAAD contributed to delaying the start of THAAD deployment shortly after THAAD deployment was determined, but not significantly. As mentioned earlier, the announcement of the MND's THAAD site was influenced by the opposition of residents living near that site. Even the MND's announcement of THAAD deployment was delayed because residents did not attend, supporting this claim. In addition, even after the location was decided, the government raised additional candidates and the THAAD placement did not get on track.

A high-level view of the conclusion of this chapter is shown in Figure 6. After THAAD was decided on, the deployment of the THAAD system was still controversial both domestically and internationally, because South Korea continued to face controversy over the selection of the deployment area. Furthermore, there was international debate over whether the actual deployment would be carried out. The THAAD deployment timeline was initially delayed due to the influence of public protests. Nevertheless, further nuclear tests by North Korea and political pressures associated with the emergence of the Trump administration in the United States contributed to the rapid start of the deployment.

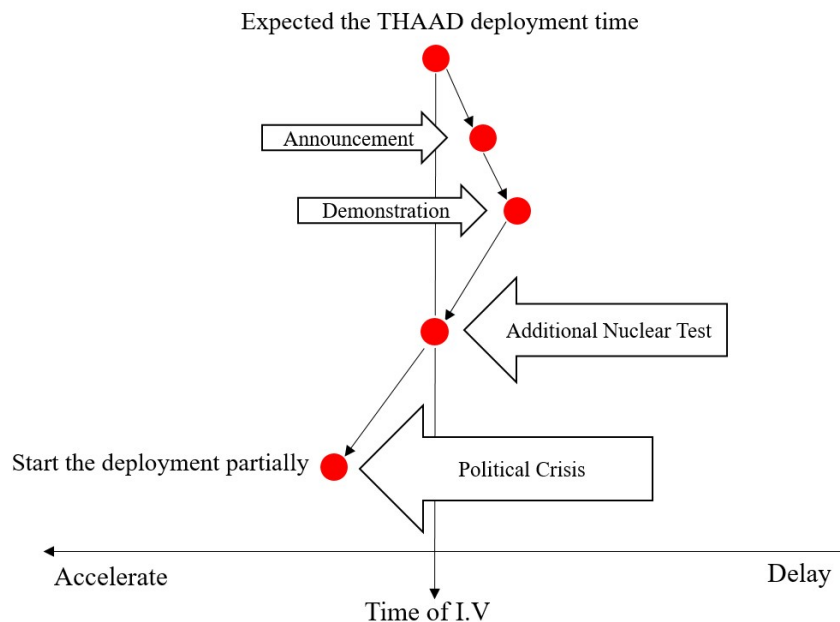


Figure 6. Timeline of the THAAD issue during the second phase.

## V. CONCLUSION

Debates over the pros and cons associated with THAAD's deployment took place in several spheres, among Korean experts, politicians, and the South Korean public.<sup>296</sup> The South Korean government had to cope with the increasing threat of North Korean nuclear capabilities and sustain cooperation with the United States for the survival of the nation. At the same time, the ROK government had to consider its relationship with China, on which it is becoming more economically dependent. Domestic political problems exacerbated this complicated situation.<sup>297</sup> The scandal associated with the president's corruption increased public doubts about the THAAD decision-making process. The three-year-long THAAD issue was still prominent in the media and among the public during President Park's trial.

This thesis has divided the controversy over THAAD according to the phases of decision and deployment, and assessed the influence of five independent drivers in this timeline: 1) changes in pressure from the United States; 2) the change in pressure from China, driving external structural changes in South Korea; 3) the increased nuclear threat from North Korea; 4) the influence of the ROK's powerful presidency and conservative South Korean policy-makers; and 5) the political participation of the public. The thesis has evaluated how these drivers influenced South Korea's decision making from the start of the debate to the deployment of the THAAD system.

### A. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS ON THE THAAD ISSUE

The first conclusion of this thesis is that the North Korean threat played the most critical role in the decision itself and in accelerating deployment of THAAD throughout the timeline. In response to the North Korean nuclear threat, which has increased rapidly since 2014, South Korea responded very sensitively and agilely using military and political means. Thus, the first official mention of THAAD was after North Korea's

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<sup>296</sup> Kyung-young Chung, "Debate on THAAD Deployment and ROK National Security," The East Asia Institute, October 2015, [http://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/kor\\_report/2015102615274064.pdf](http://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/kor_report/2015102615274064.pdf).

<sup>297</sup> Chung.

January 2016 nuclear test. North Korea's September 2016 nuclear test pushed South Korea to deploy THAAD more quickly, despite its economic dependence on China and China's opposition to THAAD. North Korea's increased nuclear threats and their technological developments have raised concerns about the survival of the South Korean people, which has increased THAAD support. Although opposition by residents in the THAAD deployment area continued, the fact that the public opinion of South Korea as a whole was consistently supportive relieved the government's concerns over China's reaction to the decision to deploy THAAD.

The second conclusion of this thesis is that political pressures from the United States and China influenced the ROK's THAAD decision in different directions. To reach this conclusion, this thesis examined senior Chinese and American visits to Seoul and the remarks of those officials. More specifically, the continued political pressure of the United States influenced South Korea's support of the THAAD decision, but China's continued opposition and economic pressure at certain times restrained South Korea's THAAD deployment. Nevertheless, China's pressure did not cause the South Korean government to reverse its THAAD decision.

The remarks and official visits of high-ranking officials from both countries put political pressure on South Korea, due to its asymmetric alliance and asymmetrical economic relations, which in turn pressured the autonomy of South Korea. But it was not true that asymmetric economic relations between South Korea and China compromised the ROK's autonomy, as Park asserts. This thesis brings new consideration to his work on the THAAD episode. Park argues that as South Korea increases its economic dependence on China, its autonomy is affected.<sup>298</sup> Yet, this thesis shows that his argument is applicable to bilateral relations but has difficulties in terms of multilateral relations. It is a fact that South Korea's trade dependence on China has continued to increase since 2002 and is the highest among trading partners. As can be seen in Figure 7, the ROK's dependence on exports to China was 10.7% in 2000 and 26.8% in 2018. Also, South Korea's import dependence on China reached a record high of 21.4% in 2016, compared

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<sup>298</sup> Park. "An Impact of the Controversies over the THAAD to the South Korea-U.S. Alliance and the South Korea-China Relation: Application of Autonomy-Security Trade Model."

with 8% in 2000. It has been on a slight decline since 2016, but it still has a high number. Notable is that overall South Korea's dependence on China for exports and imports has been on a steady rise since 2012 when the ROK's trade dependence in general was lowered.<sup>299</sup> This fact suggests that China's political and economic pressures, as Park insisted, should compromise South Korea's autonomy to have a significant influence on THAAD's decision. But this thesis shows that China could not compromise South Korea's autonomy significantly because the impact did not go beyond the agreements of the U.S. alliance.

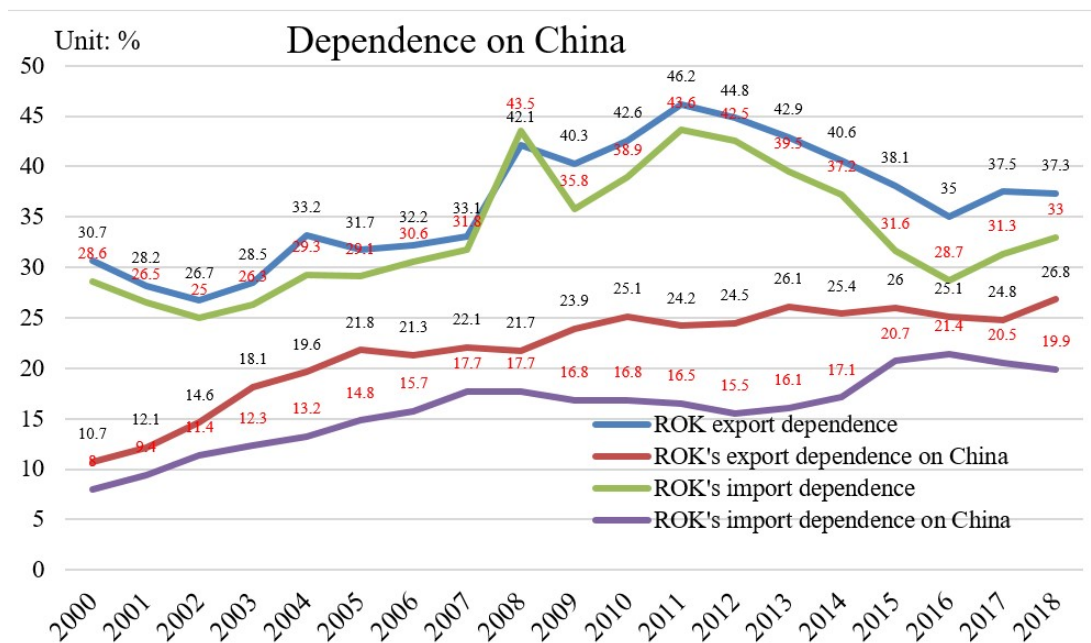


Figure 7. South Korea's economic dependence on China.<sup>300</sup>

The third conclusion of this thesis is that ROK policy-makers, a domestic factor, influenced the THAAD deployment decision, but did not affect the deployment of THAAD equipment. The emergence of a progressive leader with different political tendencies, however, did contribute to the delay in the full deployment of THAAD. As

<sup>299</sup> "Dependence on Foreign Trade of South Korea," KOTRA, accessed January 22, 2020, <http://stat.kita.net/stat/istat/cts/CtsWholeList.screen>.

<sup>300</sup> Source: "Dependence on Foreign Trade of South Korea."



mentioned in Chapter II, the Korean president is at the pinnacle of the decision-making process and has great power. Therefore, the interest of the president plays a decisive role in the decision of the state. President Park Geun-Hye, who was reluctant to make a THAAD decision because of her political relationship with China at the beginning of the THAAD case, was very disappointed by China's reaction after North Korea's January 2016 nuclear test. This shift in her perception contributed greatly to the determination of the THAAD issue. But then, her political crisis reduced her contribution, and as she eventually stepped down as president, her contribution disappeared. The progressive president who inherited her legacy tried to reverse her decision as expected, but the pressure from the United States and the increasing threat from North Korea defeated his efforts.

The fourth conclusion is that one of the domestic factors, the participation of the public, did not affect the THAAD deployment decision, but for a time delayed deployment after the THAAD decision. The reason for the lack of influence of public opinion on the THAAD decision was that by the time the public became interested in THAAD, the candidate regions for deployment were already announced. The citizens of the candidate regions showed the typical NIMBY phenomenon in different ways. Citizens of other candidate regions were less worried after the announcement of Seongju as the location of THAAD's deployment, but Seongju citizens began to protest more intensely. The opposition movement took place in various forms, including one-person demonstrations, candlelight demonstrations, and public meetings. The movement spread throughout the country via the Internet and Social Network Service (SNS), but failed to form a counterargument on the THAAD in general and failed to stop it. When the Seongju region received incentives from the state in the form of subsidies and local development plans, the protests gradually faded.

Finally, the conclusion of this thesis is that in the first phase the external factors were hardly influenced by domestic factors, whereas domestic factors were influenced by external factors. Considering the nature of the THAAD problem, which had been much more controversial inside of South Korea, it could be argued that this was natural. In the second phase, other variables tried to influence the leadership. Interestingly, external

factors forced the rapid deployment of THAAD, while domestic public opinion contributed to delayed deployment.

Table 15. Cumulative factors for THAAD decision making.

	External Factors			Domestic Factors	
I.V. Events	N. Korea	U.S.	China	Leader	Public
Rodong Test	Accelerate	→			→
Strategic Ambiguity			Delay	→	
Nuclear Test	Accelerate	→	→	→	→
Leader's perception				Accelerate	
Unha-3 Launch	Accelerate	→	→		→
Alliance Decision	Accelerate		→	Accelerate	
THAAD Decision					
Announcement				←	Delay
Demonstration				←	Delay
Nuclear Test	Accelerate	→		→	
Political Crisis		Accelerate	→	Accelerate	
THAAD deployment					

Key: In the table, red: high, yellow: low, →: dependence.

## B. DETERRENCE IMPLICATIONS

The THAAD issue is an example of how realist claims are more explanatory in military decisions. Realist arguments highlight the perceived decline in the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella and the shortage of South Korea's missile defense capabilities against North Korean threats.

To deter North Korean conventional aggression during the Cold War, the United States vowed to repel attacks on South Korea by deploying tactical nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula from 1958 to December 1991. In order to balance the growing threat from North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles, the United States promised to continue its nuclear umbrella over the Korean Peninsula even after the removal of tactical

nuclear weapons.<sup>301</sup> In the 46th to 48th SCM held from 2014 to 2016, the U.S. government reaffirmed extended deterrence to South Korea through the Joint Communiques. In these meetings, the U.S. Secretary of Defense reassured the South Korean government by promising a full range of military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, conventional strike, and missile defense capabilities from the United States.<sup>302</sup> As part of the commitment, after North Korea's fourth nuclear test on January 8, 2016, the United States deployed a B-52 bomber and F-22 stealth fighters over the Korean Peninsula. Additionally, on March 13, the U.S. nuclear aircraft carrier John C. Stennis arrived at Busan Port.<sup>303</sup>

In fact, the U.S. nuclear umbrella reassures South Korean leaders of survival and serves as a psychological factor that is actually responding to North Korean threats.<sup>304</sup> It also serves as an element that prevents a domestic debate in South Korea over the acquisition of nuclear weapons to counter North Korea. Nevertheless, North Korea's continued nuclear tests have caused South Korea to question the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella over the Korean Peninsula. Some experts argue that the success factor of the U.S. extended deterrence is credibility, and that this is the most challenging problem to solve as North Korea's missile ranges increase.<sup>305</sup>

In other words, the United States should solve these questions: 1) Will the United States use nuclear weapons to defend its ally at a time when South Korea has been attacked or a war is imminent? 2) Will it be possible to attack a country that is believed to have nuclear weapons, not only with U.S. nuclear weapons but also with overwhelming

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<sup>301</sup> Roehrig, "The U.S. Nuclear Umbrella over South Korea: Nuclear Weapons and Extended Deterrence," 651.

<sup>302</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense. *Joint Communique of 48<sup>th</sup> U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting*. Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2016; *Joint Communique of 47<sup>th</sup> U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting*. Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2015; *Joint Communique of 46<sup>th</sup> U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting*. Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2014.

<sup>303</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, *2016 Defense White Paper*, 247.

<sup>304</sup> Roehrig, 674–675.

<sup>305</sup> Roehrig, 656; William W. Kaufmann, *The Requirement of Deterrence* (Princeton, NJ: Center for International Studies, 1954), 19.

military power? Because of these questions, many politicians in South Korea argue that the U.S. nuclear umbrella is weak and that the United States should consider deploying tactical nuclear weapons to South Korea again. In particular, the Supreme Council and floor leader of South Korea's ruling Saenuri Party, after the North's fourth nuclear test in January 2016, insisted that South Korea develop its own nuclear weapons on a self-defense basis to counter the North's nuclear threats.<sup>306</sup> According to results from a survey of South Koreans in January 2016, 54% of South Korean adults supported demands for the ROK's nuclear armament, showing that public opinion also supports that argument.<sup>307</sup> The U.S. presidential election in 2016 also fueled South Korea's desire to acquire nuclear weapons. The U.S. Republican presidential candidate, Donald Trump, argued that South Korea was not carrying its share of defense contributions, and considered the possibility of withdrawing USFK, causing South Korean leaders to worry again about the credibility of the nuclear umbrella promised by the United States.<sup>308</sup>

In fact, Terence Roehrig insists that the United States would not allow the use of nuclear weapons to defend South Korea and would likely focus on conventional attacks.<sup>309</sup> The reason is that the use of nuclear weapons is likely to weaken the norm of nuclear use on other battlefields in the future, and nuclear use would have devastating consequences.<sup>310</sup> Roehrig also points to the overwhelming ability of U.S. conventional weapons to achieve its strategic effect.<sup>311</sup>

It is necessary to appreciate South Korea's lack of capabilities to understand the deployment of THAAD as a reaction to concerns over the credibility of the U.S nuclear umbrella. This is because, according to the realists' argument, the imbalance of power in

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<sup>306</sup> Whan-woo Yi, "NK Test Stirs Call for Nuclear Armament," *Korea Times*, January 18, 2016, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/01/180\\_195722.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/01/180_195722.html).

<sup>307</sup> Yi.

<sup>308</sup> Roehrig, 677–680.

<sup>309</sup> Roehrig, 651–653.

<sup>310</sup> Roehrig, 651–653.

<sup>311</sup> Roehrig, 651–653.

anarchy's international politics is a motivation for a state to seek an internal balance through an increase of the state's national material power.<sup>312</sup> From 2014 to 2016, South Korea sought to increase its own ability to defend the Korean Peninsula against North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles, which is an example of internal balancing.

The ROK established its attack system, called the Kill Chain, to effectively suppress and respond to North Korean nuclear and missile threats. Yet, according to the *2016 Defense White Paper*, there are limitations to the ROK's surveillance and strike capability. Specifically, the ROK military has not secured high-altitude reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicles (HUAV) and military reconnaissance satellites for surveillance of North Korea, and does not have enough ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and air-to-ground guided missiles to strike major North Korean facilities.<sup>313</sup>

South Korea is also developing its own Korea Air & Missile Defense (KAMD) system, which consists of an early warning system, command control system, and intercept system. In 2016, South Korea possessed early warning radar, Aegis ship capabilities, Patriot missiles to carry out missions for core facilities, and planes in the metropolitan area. In addition, the ROK Ministry of National Defense expected purchase of an upgraded version of Patriot missiles for overlapping defense of critical assets, and completion of development and deployment of the Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (M-SAM) and the Long Range Surface to Air Missile (L-SAM) to be around mid-2020.<sup>314</sup> Thus additional assets and capabilities are needed that were not yet obtained in 2016.

According to the analysis and projections of John Schilling and Henry Kan in April 2015, North Korea's delivery system had about 1,000 missiles in 2015; estimates of its arsenal varied from "Low-End" to "High-End" by 2020. (See Figure 8.) Considering that the military response should always be prepared for the worst case and prepare for

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<sup>312</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2010), 118–25.

<sup>313</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, *2016 Defense White Paper*, 59.

<sup>314</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, 61.

the threat, it is hard to say that South Korea's countermeasures are realistically responding to the "high-end." Because even if the deployment of M-SAM and L-SAM begins around mid-2020, it will take considerable time to deploy across South Korea, which would put some limitations on filling security gaps. Also, if some time is required for correcting errors, or operational requirements in the development stage occur, the development period could grow.

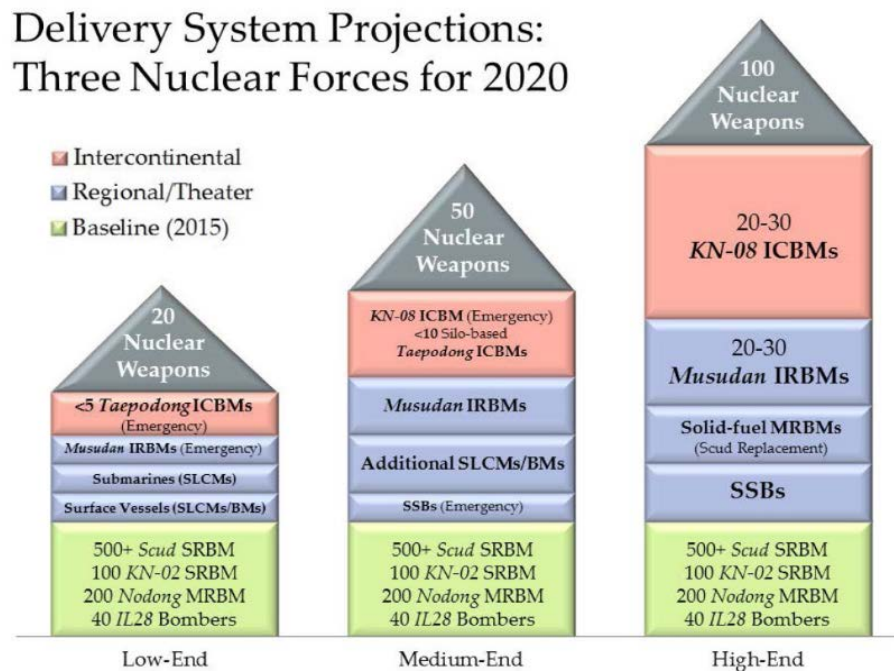


Figure 8. Delivery system projection of North Korea.<sup>315</sup>

Still, questions remain as to whether the ROK-U.S. alliance's decision to deploy THAAD to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats is solely due to gaps in defense forces. The first question is whether, as John J. Mearsheimer argues, the state continues to pursue material power until it has the capacity to pursue a consistently overwhelming capability in the context of anarchy of international politics.<sup>316</sup> The

<sup>315</sup> Source: John Schilling and Henry Kan, *The Future of North Korean Nuclear Delivery Systems* (Johns Hopkins University Washington, DC, School of Advanced International Studies, 2015), 23, [https://www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NKNF\\_Delivery-Systems.pdf](https://www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NKNF_Delivery-Systems.pdf).

<sup>316</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001).

second question is whether THAAD deployments actually play a role in external balance and preventing abandonment by the United States, even though other options, such as the deployment of aircraft carriers, strategic bombers, and nuclear submarines, can play a similar role.

Thus, South Korea's THAAD resolution served as an axis to maintain external balance as one of the military options to fill security gaps against North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats, as well as a requirement to fill the gaps in internal balancing.

### **C. POLICY RELEVANCE: THE PERIL OF SOUTH KOREA'S 'BALANCER POLICY'**

The conclusion of this thesis conveys the following important consideration to decision-makers in South Korea: South Korea's 'balancer policy' hinders rapid military response to North Korean threats. South Korea continues its efforts to gain both Chinese economic interests and U.S. security interests. Balanced diplomacy in Korea, however, poses a dilemma in the ROK's policy exhibited by the THAAD controversy and by the many concerns about the decision and deployment of THAAD. This policy soon hindered the rapid response to North Korean threats. Repeated phenomena would pose a serious threat to South Korea's survival.

South Korea's desire for balanced diplomacy began with the growth of economic and military power. The ROK continued to demand the return of OPCON, which has been delegated to the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command since the 1980s.<sup>317</sup> Eventually, in 1994, the armistice OPCON was returned, and in 2003, the Roh Moo-Hyun government demanded the return of the wartime OPCON.<sup>318</sup> Although the return of wartime OPCON was delayed to 2020 due to North Korea's provocations and domestic political debate, the current trend toward increasing autonomy continued within the framework of the ROK-U.S. alliance. It also brought about considerable changes in

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<sup>317</sup> "OPCON Transfer," *Global Security*, accessed December 27, 2019, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/dod/usfk-opcon.htm>.

<sup>318</sup> "OPCON Transfer.

foreign policy.<sup>319</sup> South Korea's efforts to strengthen independence led the Roh Moo-Hyun administration to attempt to transition from U.S.-centered diplomacy to "balanced diplomacy" in Northeast Asia.<sup>320</sup> Such a transition has not only gradually diversified South Korea's diplomacy previously centered on the United States, but also sought to make balance a reality, especially by improving relations with China, one of the major powers.<sup>321</sup> President Lee Myung-Bak continued to carry out this policy and signed a strategic cooperative partnership with China on August 25, 2008. President Park Geun-Hye also tried to improve ROK-China relations with President Xi Jinping, and in September 2015, South Koreans visited China to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Victory Day as part of these efforts.<sup>322</sup>

As a matter of fact, South Korea's efforts to promote national interests by acting as a balancer between China and the United States in Northeast Asia have the potential to benefit relations with both the United States and China if successful. Conversely, failure could result in pressure from both the United States and China, or the lack of a clear relationship with either side. South Korea, for example, has curbed North Korea's nuclear threat through extended deterrence from the United States, but there is a risk that the U.S. commitments may become uncertain if relations with the United States are compromised by balanced diplomacy. Moreover, if Sino-Korean relations are properly improved through a balancer policy, economic and security interests can be expected, but if not, there is a high possibility of being vulnerable to China's economic and security interference.

South Korea has pursued a security advantage in this dilemma, but it has been delayed considerably in time. North Korea and South Korea share borders, and North Korea could launch large quantities of missiles whenever and wherever they want. North

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<sup>319</sup> Clint Work, "The Long History of South Korea's OPCON Debate," *The Diplomat*, November 1, 2019, accessed December 27, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/11/the-long-history-of-south-koreas-opcon-debate/>.

<sup>320</sup> Work.

<sup>321</sup> Work.

<sup>322</sup> "Status of High-Level Personnel Exchanges between Korea and China."



Korea even has the ability to bomb Japanese bases where U.S. assets are waiting to enter the peninsula. Nevertheless, South Korea, in response to North Korean threats, succeeded in fully deploying an entire THAAD artillery in September 2017, after three years of deliberation. But the THAAD experience shows that South Korea's continued pursuit of a balancer policy, which requires good relations with China, could hinder the rapid military response to North Korean threats.

#### **D. LIMITATIONS**

This thesis has the following limitations: 1) the reliability of data related to President Park Geun-hye, and 2) the selection of factors that influenced South Korea's THAAD decision.

First of all, most of the data on President Park Geun-hye, one of the independent variables, were inaccessible, because the trial regarding Park's scandal was in progress. For these reasons, most of Park Geun-hye's data were analyzed through newspapers or publicly available information. Analysis of data from secondary sources may reduce the credibility or objectivity of the data.

Second, limiting external factors that could affect South Korea's policy decisions related to North Korea, China, and the United States have resulted in the exclusion of the effects of factors such as Japan and Russia or the role of various institutions. Japan and Russia have a significant portion of the security sector in East Asia. Restricting external factors to the United States, China, and North Korea increases the likelihood of delivering a narrow perspective to research conclusions.

#### **E. FUTURE RESEARCH**

The result of the thesis emphasizes the need for further research on South Korea's autonomy: How should South Korea, the middle power nation, change its relations with China and the United States to maximize the ROK's autonomy? Alliances and economic interdependencies are pervasive phenomena throughout the world. Indeed, similar to South Korea, many countries in East Asia rely on the United States for security, and their

economies depend on China. In these countries, the degree of dependence varies widely and their degree of autonomy varies greatly.

For example, as shown in Figure 9, countries in East Asia might have different relationships with the United States and China. At the same time, their degree of autonomy also differs. The “C State” shows how a country might have great dependence on both powers, as indicated by the nearly balanced positions of the respective Military and Economy markers, but the “C State” could still have maximum autonomy because the dependence is balanced (as indicated by the red Autonomy marker positioned at the intersection of the x and y axes). Comparing selected countries with information from historical cases would allow an assessment of when autonomy is maximized for South Korea. This type of research would also be meaningful for other countries.

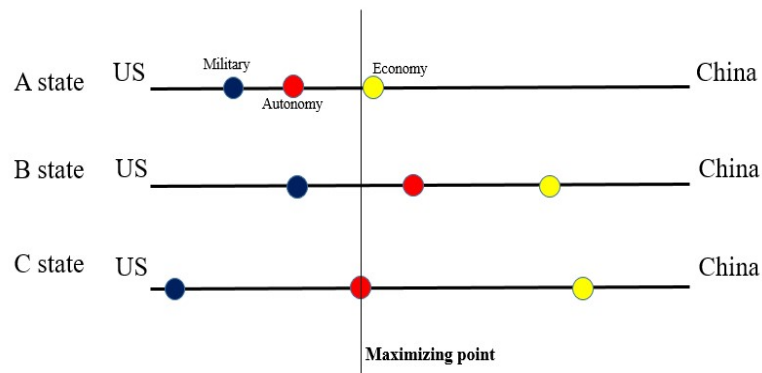


Figure 9. Hypothetical example of future research.

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